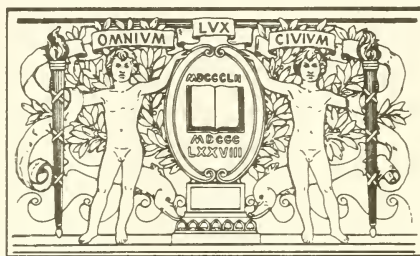




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"FIRELIGHT."

Lights of Child-Land

By

MAUD BALLINGTON BOOTH

Author of "Sleepy Time Stories" etc.

Illustrated by

ALICE FARNSWORTH-DREW



G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS

NEW YORK AND LONDON

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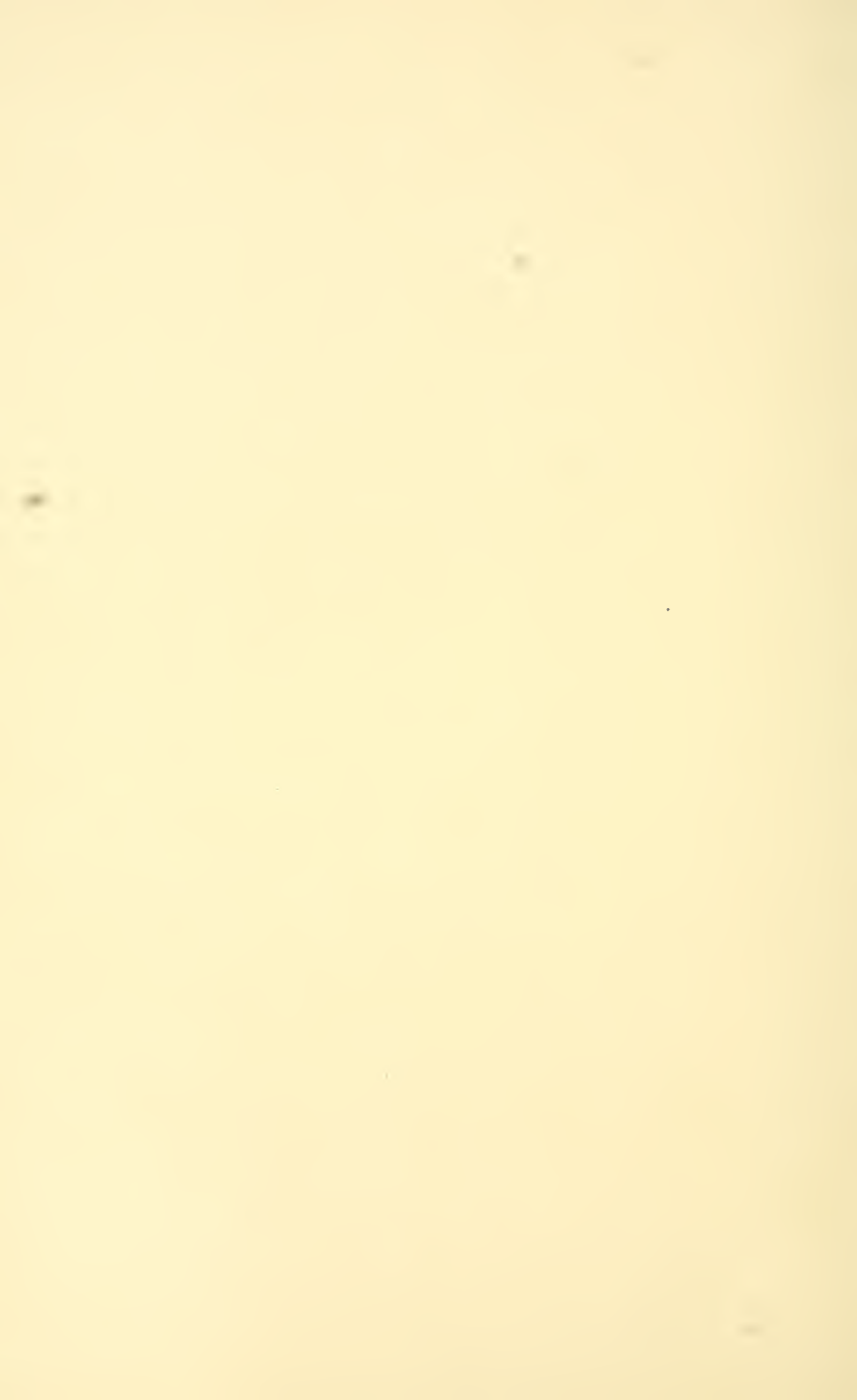
MAUD B. BOOTH.

To

CHARLES D. STICKNEY

My long-time friend and the “godfather” of
“SLEEPY-TIME STORIES”

This my second book is gratefully dedicated.



PREFACE.

LITTLE hearts are very ready to love and the more this precious gift is used the richer do their lives become. Those that are thwarted in their natural growth, blighted by selfishness, or stunted by having no outlet to the natural up-springing tenderness of their being, are indeed to be pitied.

As we place trellis work near the young tendrils of the climbing vines for them to cling to, so should we ever give child-hearts something to love, and the more they reach out to others in tender sympathy, the more will they be linked to that which is sweet and good; unselfish and helpful.

If God is love and Heaven is made by His presence, then it is in human power to bring some of heaven's atmosphere to gladden and brighten this world and thereby to link human hearts in some measure with the Divine.

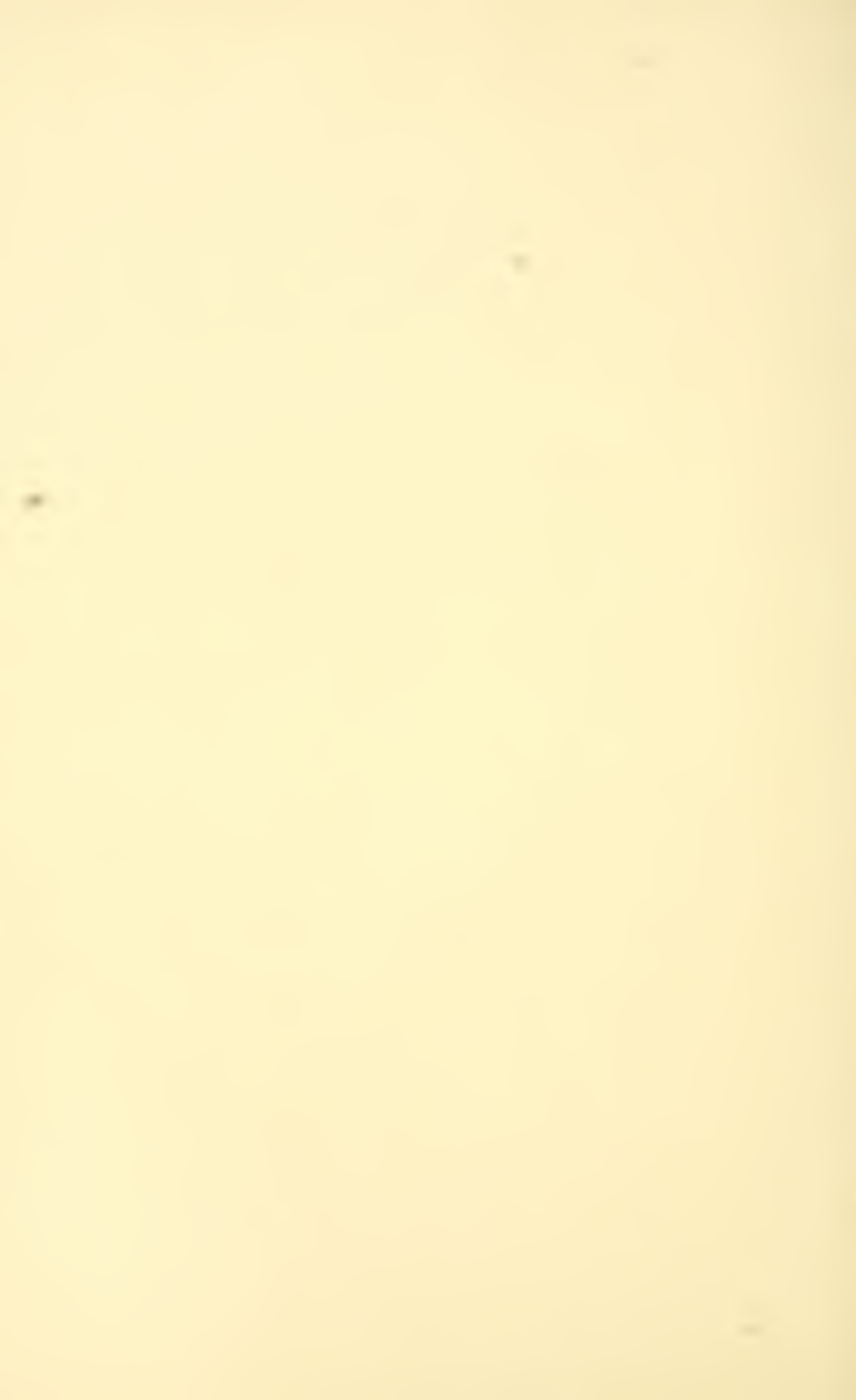
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NEW YORK, 1901.

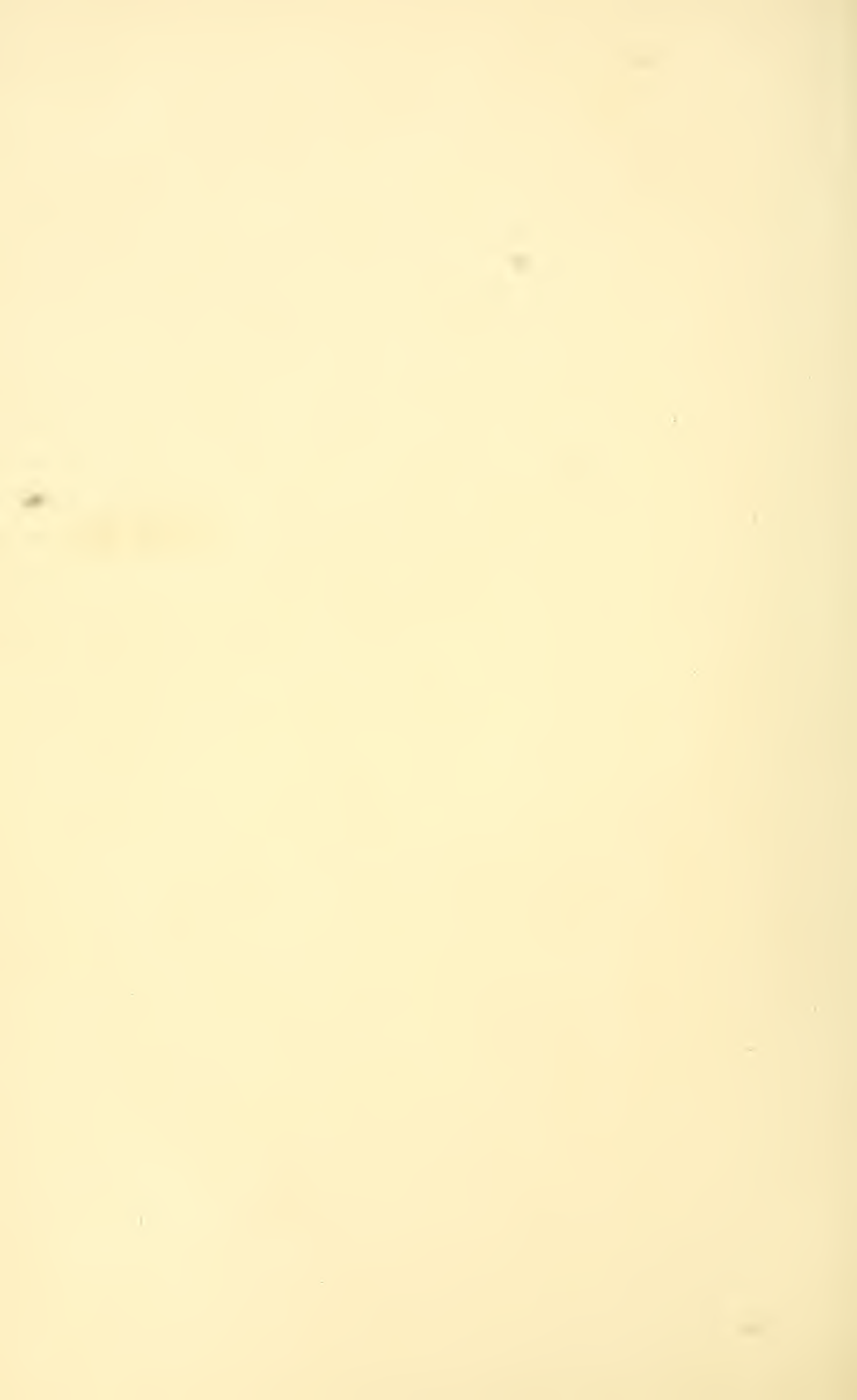


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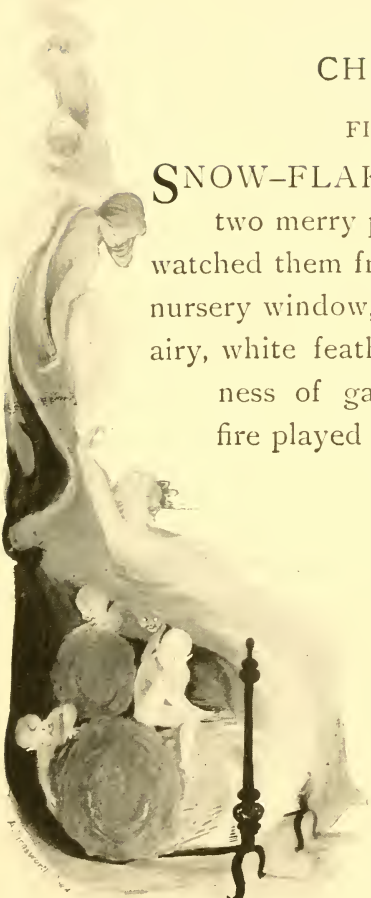


FIRELIGHT.



CHAPTER I.

FIRELIGHT.



SNOW-FLAKES were falling. To two merry pairs of child-eyes that watched them from the alcove of the nursery window, they looked like soft, airy, white feathers against the darkness of gathering night. A big fire played on the nursery hearth, and real yule logs crackling sent spark fairies up the chimney, while mysterious, blue elf flames played hide and seek over the brown bark.

Brown Eyes and Baby Dimple had been watching the sparks and weaving stories of

their own about the fire fairies, but growing weary had turned to the window, pulling back the warm curtains, and now the ruddy glow from within caught the falling flakes as they passed the zone of light, making them for a moment almost like sparks themselves, only to lose their brightness, and fade away pale and ghostly in the shadows below.

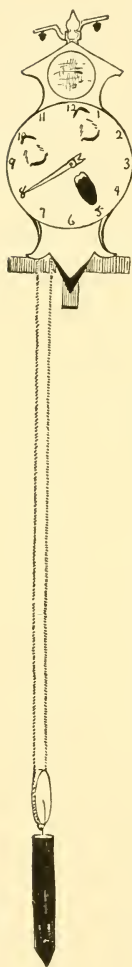
"I am so glad it is snowing!" shouted Brown Eyes, his fingers drumming gaily on the pane. "I hope it will snow and snow and snow all night, for, that is what it ought to do, Baby, on Christmas Eve. Then we'll have a real white Christmas, and I more than half believe Santa Claus is going to bring me a sled, and if he does, I'll take you out sleighing. Won't we just go wizz down the hill?" Baby Dimple made no comment save a little sleepy laugh, and the big, blue eyes that were watching and trying to follow the giddy whirl of the ever-gathering snow flakes in the mazes of their dance, had the wondering far-away look, that told they were finding their focus for views into dreamland. The ticking

of the clock and the crackle of the logs made the only sounds till a startled cry from the children told that window pane reveries had been abruptly broken off by some startling occurrence. Close to the window stood an old tree, beautiful in Spring for its apple blossoms of pink and white; in Summer for the dainty little nests hidden away in its leafy shade; and in Fall for the ruddy apples Baby Dimple would catch in her little white apron from her brother astride the old brown branch overhead. Now the tree was naked and bare save that a rim of new snow lay on the branches and twigs, glittering like the span-gles on an old fashioned Christmas card. Suddenly and noiselessly out of the misty shadows of the tree a great mass of whiteness hurled itself at the sill of the lighted window at which the little faces could be clearly seen with a background of firelight. It was startling to be brought back with a bound from sleepy-time feelings, and from the flights of imagination that had carried at least one of the little ones far on the road to meet Santa

Claus's sleigh. They were not foolish or cowardly, however, and in a moment were laughing and kissing the pane where two big amber colored eyes peered blinkingly in, and a soft furry head was rubbed coaxingly against the window, a pink mouth opening meanwhile in pleading mews that could not be heard.

"Dear Snowball, he's cold, Baby wants him let in," was the command which had to be followed by much effort on Brown Eyes' part, which succeeded at last, and in sprang the children's long haired puss, accompanied by a sprinkling of snow and a gust of chill wind that made the blue flames leap on the logs, sending whole armies of sparks chimney-ward.

Mother entered and the striking of the clock announced to both little ones that it was past sleepy-time, but on this occasion there was no begging to sit up "just a little



longer," not even a plea for "one story." Baby Dimple trotted off to bath and bed like a gentle little lamb, and Brown Eyes declared his intention of going at the same time, though his advantage in age gave him an extra hour. This unnatural readiness to go to bed was caused, of course, by the fact that it was Christmas Eve, and that the sooner to sleep the sooner would Christmas come, but the frisky way in which our boy jumped and skipped about the nursery precluded the likelihood of sleepiness, and very much offended the dignity of Snowball who was washing his fluffy paws before the fire in a sedate and businesslike fashion. An interruption in this occupation, in which he fixed his inquiring yellow eyes on his little master was fatal to the advance of his toilet, for Brown Eyes, in the exuberance of his spirit, sprang to the fireside, and seizing the big, white ball in his arms, rubbed up the long coat and covering the unwilling cat with excited little kisses, exclaimed,

"Oh pussy, pussy dear, do you know Santa

Claus is coming? Do you know that there is only one night now? Will you keep your big yellow eyes open and watch for him, or will you go to sleep like a good cat, and be very surprised at all you see in the morning?"

Snowball had grown out of kitten days when kissing and romping were allowable, and now he very strongly objected to liberties of any kind, except, occasionally from the little pink hands of his beloved mistress. So he struggled away from Brown Eyes and with a tail indignantly slashing the air, he sprang to the table and sat there carefully washing every accessible part of his fur, that the dear little hands had touched.

"That is very impolite," said an injured little voice, "my hands are quite clean, I scrubbed them hard before supper, and now you are washing yourself all over again as if I had spoiled your fur. You are a cross cat. I'll go away to bed and leave you, and I hope Santa Claus will hear about your way of treating me when I only wanted to love you,

for he certainly won't leave anything for you after that."



As he left the nursery Brown Eyes popped his little head in again and shouted, "Good night, cross cat." To which Snowball vouchsafed no reply, even by look, being at that moment deeply engaged in carefully rubbing the offending kisses off the top of his head, with a paw licked for that purpose between each effort. But the words were heard, and while he continued to comb his long white coat with his rough pink tongue, he had to listen to the old clock ticking aggravatingly, "Cross cat, cross cat, cross cat." He pretended at first to take no notice and simulated utter indifference, but at last he could stand it no longer, and with a bound reached the floor, glided through a crack of the door and fled.



There was one place

where Snowball's ruffled spirits always found soothing and comfort. If Lion, a big St. Bernard, trod on his fluffy tail, just after he had spent half an hour in getting it beautifully combed; if a sparrow he had intended for supper caught sight of him, when he was crouching to spring, and had flown away screaming, "Catch me if you can, old yellow eyes!" (an especially odious allusion, because he knew his eyes ought to have been blue like his father's), he always fled to his city of refuge, his one haven of peace where he was never distressed by the insults and annoyances of the world. This place was the foot of a certain, little white cot, and on this particular evening as he crawled into the already darkened room, he found a warm little mistress with the faint memories of Pear's soap, and a few little, damp curls here and there on the pillow, to tell him, who found everything out by the use of his nose, that she had just been scrubbed, and rubbed, and tucked away between the white sheets as fresh as a rose bud after a shower.

Snowball stood looking at his beloved mistress. She had evidently fallen off to sleep already, for, not only were the sweet blue eyes shut, but the gentle rise and fall of the sheet told of regular, unconscious breathing. Cautiously he crept a step nearer, and then the yellow eyes shone with anger and his tail lashed the air menacingly, for what did he see peeping out from the dear, little protecting arm, but the green glass eye of his much hated enemy, the furry black and white stuffed monkey that he would many a time have loved to scratch to pieces had he dared. Baby Dimple was a loving "cuddley baby," that he had often heard her mother say. When she was not being cuddled herself, she always wanted to cuddle something else, and that something had to be furry. Her toy horse was too big by far, and Lion, the dog, would have filled the whole cot, so the only rival feared by her pet kitten was that monkey, the advent of which from Europe had filled his heart at first with terror, and then I am sorry to say, with a very uncomfortable feeling called jealousy.

Snowball knew quite well that his place was at the foot of the bed, and remembered the many occasions on which he had been unearthed from his warm little nest under the sheets, when mother came to bed and ruthlessly turned him out. But somehow, he always tried to get his own way on that point, and if Baby Dimple was awake she rather encouraged him, "Because," as she whispered to his great comfort in his furry ear, "you see, Snowball, you are alive and warm and monkey isn't." She loved to feel the contented purr, pur-r vibrating through the happy cat in her arms, as much as he loved to feel the warm, soft breath playing on the top of his head, and the dear little warm body soothing him with its loving pressure.

On this particular evening he wanted comforting. He had been shut out in the snow storm, that had chilled him and wetted his nice, well kept coat; then, when he had washed and cleaned himself, Brown Eyes had ruffled him up, and he had lost his temper; that senseless old clock had mocked him,

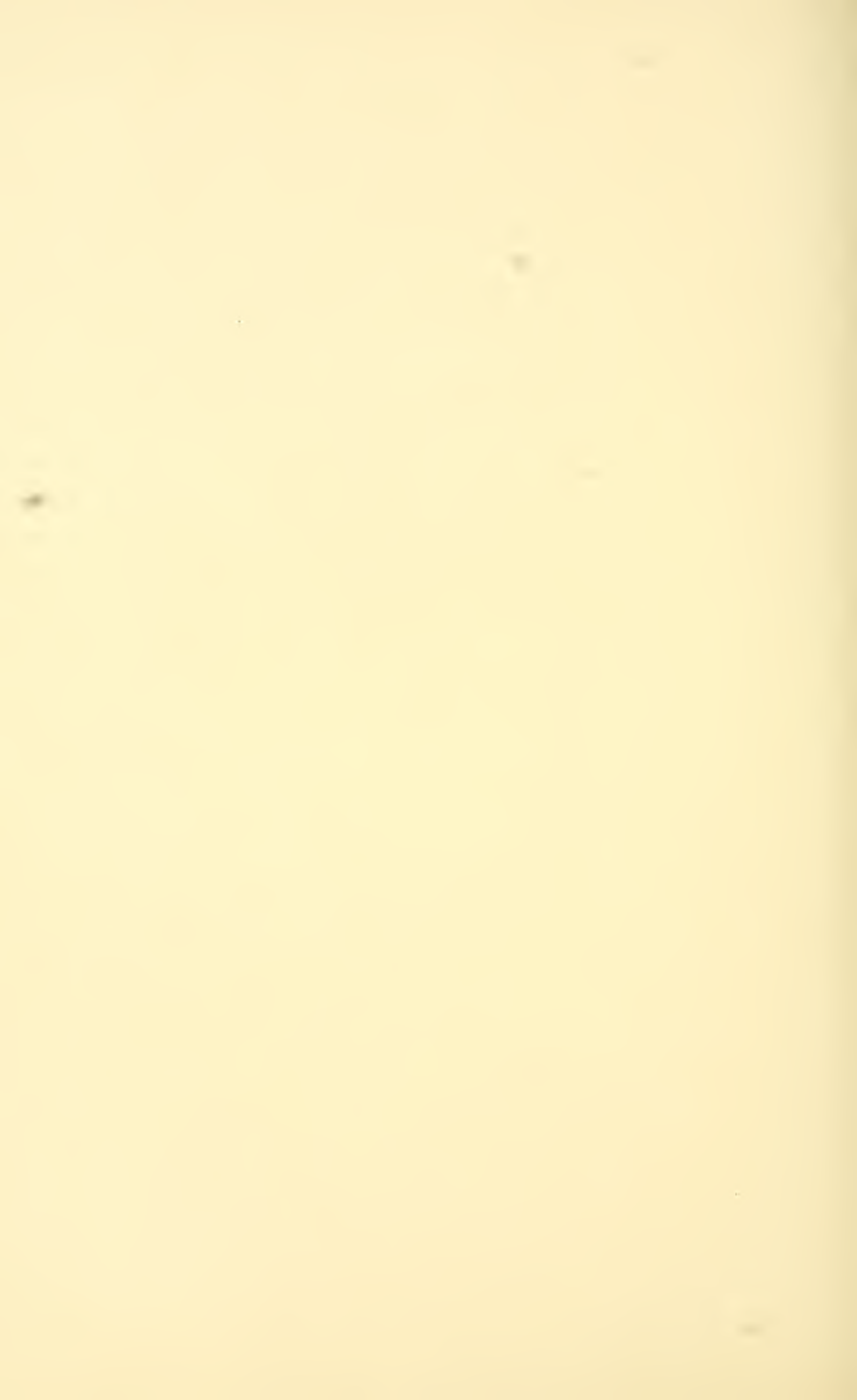
echoing and re-echoing Brown Eyes' remark, and now, to find his place filled and the baby gone to dreamland, so that she could not throw out the wretched intruder, was past endurance. Snowball cautiously sat down on the pillow, and gave the little pink cheek a gentle touch with his rough tongue. The baby stirred, and, Oh, horrors ! the sweet lips sought the monkey's senseless head and kissed it. The green eye gleamed with vindictive triumph, it seemed to poor Snowball, while the empty socket, where the other eye should have been, glared blankly with a vacancy, which seemed to his cat imagination to say, " I don't see any one ! A white cat, did you say ? Oh no, there is no such thing. This is my place, there is no possible room for any intruder."

Snowball had a very strong impulse to scratch his adversary away and push himself in, as he would have done in his kitten days, but he gave up, remembering he was too big now, and having a painfully vivid recollection of on one occasion, leaving a long, red mark

on the sweet pink arm, for which he had suffered remorse for days, been called by the nurse "a wicked, cruel cat." So on that occasion there was no help for it but to leave the monkey in possession of the best place, so carefully pulling down the sheet, he crept in behind, curling up like a big ball against Baby Dimple's warm, little spinal column.

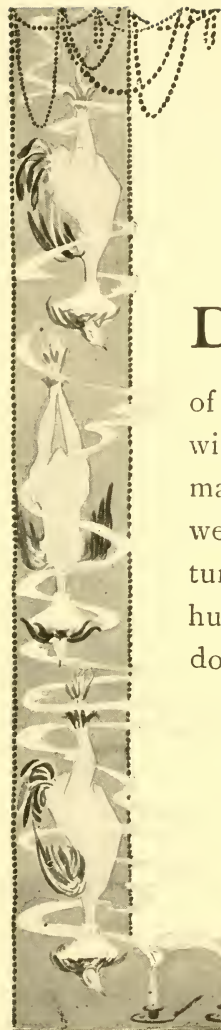
When some hours later, mother came up to peep at her darlings, she found in one room a very wakeful pair of brown eyes, two little feet beating a vigorous tattoo on the bed, and a desperate little voice that lamented, "I just can't go to sleep." As a contrast to this was the stillness of her own room, where the peaceful baby slumberer dreamed, perhaps of dolls and horses coming over the snow in a wonderful sleigh; and the now happy cat, who had forgotten his sorrows in his own dreamland of delight, where unnumbered mice played with flocks of sparrows by rivers of cream. It was Christmas Eve, so mother's heart relented, and she let the faithful, white ball sleep on. So only the wakeful, green eye of the monkey

watched for Santa Claus, "and he," as Baby Dimple confessed rather ungrammatically to pussy in trying to administer comfort, "couldn't see nothing."



GASLIGHT.





CHAPTER II.

GASLIGHT.

DESPITE the whirling snow storm, the down town streets of the great city were thronged with a busy, bustling crowd; the markets in the narrow side streets were doing a rushing trade in turkeys, chickens and ducks, that hung with their scraggy necks downward, as if the only mourners at that glad Christmas season, and refused to be comforted by the holly, tinsel and paper flowers with which they were bedecked. The gay stalls of

the street vendors were brilliant with the trimmings of Christmas trees ; gold and silver balls, colored candles, sparkling reflectors, yards and yards of brittle beads of all the hues of the rainbow. Cheap toys, gaudy dolls, and highly colored candies were displayed everywhere in bewildering confusion. The cries of the vendors, and the shouts of the drivers of passing trucks and carts, made the air as full of confusion and din, as the jostling crowd could make the sidewalks bewildering and impassable.

It was into that scene that little Flip pushed his small body, and upon these bewildering delights that his big, black eyes gazed with the look of the hungry dog, that can only be fed by watching the feasts of the more fortunate of his kind. He was a miserable, undersized looking little fellow, very red of hair, pale of face (where the want of color could be seen under the grime acquired in the city streets) and ragged as to clothes. He had neither shoes nor stockings, and was constantly rubbing one cold, blue little foot



"FLIP."



on the other, to try and bring back some sense of feeling in the numb little toes. At just about the hour when our little boy had so cheerily shouted, "I am glad it is snowing, Baby," he had been standing, a snow covered little figure, on the corner of a street leading to one of the ferries. He was trying to keep his papers dry under his tattered coat and saying ruefully to himself, "I wish it hadn't snowed, I'll not make nothing to-night, I don't see the good o' snow nohow, unless it's t' freeze half the world and make t'other half glad they've got clothes and fires and things."

A sorry two hours had elapsed in which he had shouted, "*Sun, Even-in' Sun, Sun, Telegram,*" with only the sale of half his papers and then came a disaster. A gentleman had motioned him for a paper, and two other newsboys, wishing to head him off, plunged across the street. He, following, had unluckily slipped, losing his papers in the fall, for they were scattered in the mud and tramped on by the



passing horses, before he could reclaim them. The gentleman had been very kind, however. It was Christmas Eve and he had little boys of his own at home, so two bright, new ten cent pieces found their way into Flip's palm as consolation for the lost papers. But, alas, the gentleman had not watched the sequel, which was much like the scene enacted, where one sparrow gets an extra big crumb, and the others want to share it.

The two big boys pursued him, and a tussle began in which all three were rolled in the mud stained snow, and Flip's poor, cold little fist was forced open and made to surrender the spoil which was theirs, they held, by right of superior strength. "Cop's comin'," cried one, and away they went leaving little Flip to be shaken and cuffed by the policeman for fighting, and told to "get out with you, quick now, make yourself scarce." It was only the natural course of the battle for existence on which he had been launched. It is no use crying over spilt milk, is the old saying, or as Flip put it to himself in a new way for want

of knowing the old adage, "It ain't no use doin' the baby act, hollerin' won't get me back my dimes." So he philosophically resigned himself to the inevitable, and following the policeman's advice "made himself scarce" and disappeared into the crowded side streets.

Poor little chap, though he did not cry, his heart did feel a bit heavier as he turned his steps to the fairy land of cheap Christmas joys, a visit to which he had planned all day after his paper selling would be over. It was not that he wanted to buy any of the candy, toys, or good things his eyes were to revel in,—that had all along been out of the question, but he wanted to put some money by "'gainst rent day," for it was something to keep one's own home in a big, cold city, where little feet get weary of the hard, chilly sidewalks, and little heads get tired of dodging blows and being hustled hither and thither, as more or less in all the world's way.

Flip had nothing at all romantic about his history, it was just like lots of other boys he knew, and he did not pity himself because he did not know he was entitled to pity.

When he was born his father and mother had two rooms pretty well furnished, and though the little garments in which he was clothed were of coarse material and homely fashion, there was lots of love in every stitch, and his little red head had received as many tender mother kisses as other little heads born to lie on down pillows. The first three years, however hard they proved for the brave little mother, were easy years for him. But then came sickness. He cried in those days because he had to stay so much in bed with the mother who was too weak to sit up, and would not let him out in the streets because she was afraid he would get lost or run over. She gave that explanation once to a neighbor woman, who had called in to see her, and got in response the comforting assurance :

“ He ain’t so mighty handsome as anyun ’ud want t’ steal ’im, and as to gettin’ kilt, well you’ll soon be gone yourself, and it’s a mighty tough place for brats as is left to fettle for ’emselves.”

He found it “mighty tough” after they

took away the cold, quiet sleeping mother, who would not wake up when he called her. His father took a little attic room at the top of the same house, and moved such furniture, as had not been sold during the sickness, into their new home. He was not an unkind or bad man, this father of his. They loved each other, or, "sorter hung together" as Flip put it, when some other boys asked him in later years why he didn't strike out for himself, instead of taking his small earnings home. Though the man was steady and anxious to work, he was what the neighbors called "mighty unlucky."

He lost jobs when he got them; got sick when he might have kept at work; one winter he had rheumatic fever, and next he fell from a ladder and broke his thigh, and now, this Christmas, he was in the hospital after a car accident that had battered and mangled him horribly.

When little Flip (it was his father who had first abbreviated the name Philip into this form) was left motherless, the other mothers

in the big tenement where many families lived "gave an eye to the poor kid," which meant that from time to time, he would be seized as he toddled up the stairs from the street and vigorously rubbed and scrubbed, then put to bed by some good soul, while she performed a like office for his poor little petticoats and frocks. It also meant that he got odds and ends of dinners, and never went very long too hungry for endurance, and once or twice it took the shape of a good thrashing, when he was supposed to be in need of the same. Once in those early days he took it into his head to see how far he could walk, and when his short legs got tired, he could not tell where he was or how to get home. He had been carried by a policeman to the station house, and this was an awful experience to his small heart, as the policeman catching him had been a dire threat of punishment always held over his head by those who took a hand in his up-bringing. His father had come home from a day's tramp for work, and had hunted him up, and brought him back to the attic. But those

days of childhood seemed long ago now, for he was ten and had been earning his living for some time, learning to take knocks without crying, and helping his father, when that father was more "unlucky" than usual.

So that Christmas Eve he took his pleasure in seeing what other happier poor children would receive, and when too cold and weary to wander the streets any longer, he trotted home, and climbed the many flights of dirty stairs to his garret. Half way up the last flight where it was quite dark, he stumbled against a little crouching figure, and heard the tired out sob of a child exhausted by grief.

"Why, Sue," he whispered, "what's up now?"

"Oh, Flip, I've been a naughty, wicked girl again, mother says, and the cops are sure to be after me this time," was the sobbing response.

"No they won't neither, so long's I'm here. Tell us what you've been gone and done?"

"I tumbled up stairs and broked the jug and spilt the beer; it warn't my fault, 'cause the

sole of my shoe was off, and I caught my foot on that broken board and it throwed me."

"And what did your mother do?" asked Flip, without knowing how much it helps hearts to unburden themselves of their sorrow. He had an idea that she felt better if she talked.

"Oh she didn't do nothin' much, she just beat me and said I could sit out on the stairs until she called me t' go t' bed, and I couldn't have nothing to eat, but I don't care for that, 'cause I couldn't eat the bread, it choked me," and poor, little Sue began to sob afresh.

"What are yo' cryin' fur, little un?" said Flip mystified, "the beatin' is over, yo' don't want t' eat, and you'll soon git called in."

"It's father, he came up 'fore it got quite dark and from up here I could hear him, he said, 'Where's the little un?' and mother said, 'She's been bad again,' and he said something hot and then asked, 'Where is she now?' and mother said, 'I don't know and don't care, she'll turn up soon enough, bad pennies allers do.' At that, father just banged

the door and went out, and you know how he'll come home. Father's so good to me."

More sobs began to make Flip feel that he had too big a contract on his hands in the business of a comforter.

"Oh, cheer up now, Sue, perhaps your father'll come home all right, and as for your mother, she'll not beat you any more to-night. It's a pity *own* mothers go and die like ours did, ain't it, little un?" he added, "but I'm just glad my dad le' me boss m'self, and didn't bring another un home t' look after me, 'cause bein' looked after ain't allers pleasant, be it, Sue?"

Sobs were less frequent but had not ceased by any means, so Flip tried another tack.

"Say, there are wonderful fine things all over the place to-night, things to eat, and things t' look at, and things, I don't know what they're meant fur, and they're mighty fine."

"Yes, I know, it's Christmas comin'," said Sue, cutting short her sobs.

"Tell us about it."

"Well it's meant for kids as has *own*

mothers livin' and fathers as ain't unlucky, and they gets lots of presents, and I've heard talk of Santa Claus, as is a sorter o' foreign lookin' chap, and comes to the rich children's homes, 'cause I s'pose he's friends with their mothers, and leaves things for 'em t' find when they wake up. Oh, Flip, do you think p'raps he was friends with *our* mothers once, and might happen to forget they've gone away, and p'raps might stop here by mistake like and leave us something?"

Flip laughed at Sue's eager voice from which the sound of tears had gone. "Not very likely, but he might, you know, just by mistake."

A voice roused the children. "Sue, Sue, mother says come to bed, come, little un."

"Oh, Flip," cried the child gladly, "it's father, he's home, and his voice is steady. I'll ask him if my first mother ever knowd Mr. Santa Claus."

The little figure darted down the garret stairs to the landing below. The door slammed and Flip was alone. He climbed the

remaining stairs and pushed open the door of his room. There was no furniture there, it had long since vanished through "ill luck," but a mattress in the corner kept him from having to sleep on the boards, and an old overcoat of his father's, not needed now he



was in the hospital, served as a covering. He turned to the small mansard window and looked skyward. Only a few flakes were falling now and stars shone. "That's good," said Flip. He had a very faint idea of God and it was always associated with the stars,

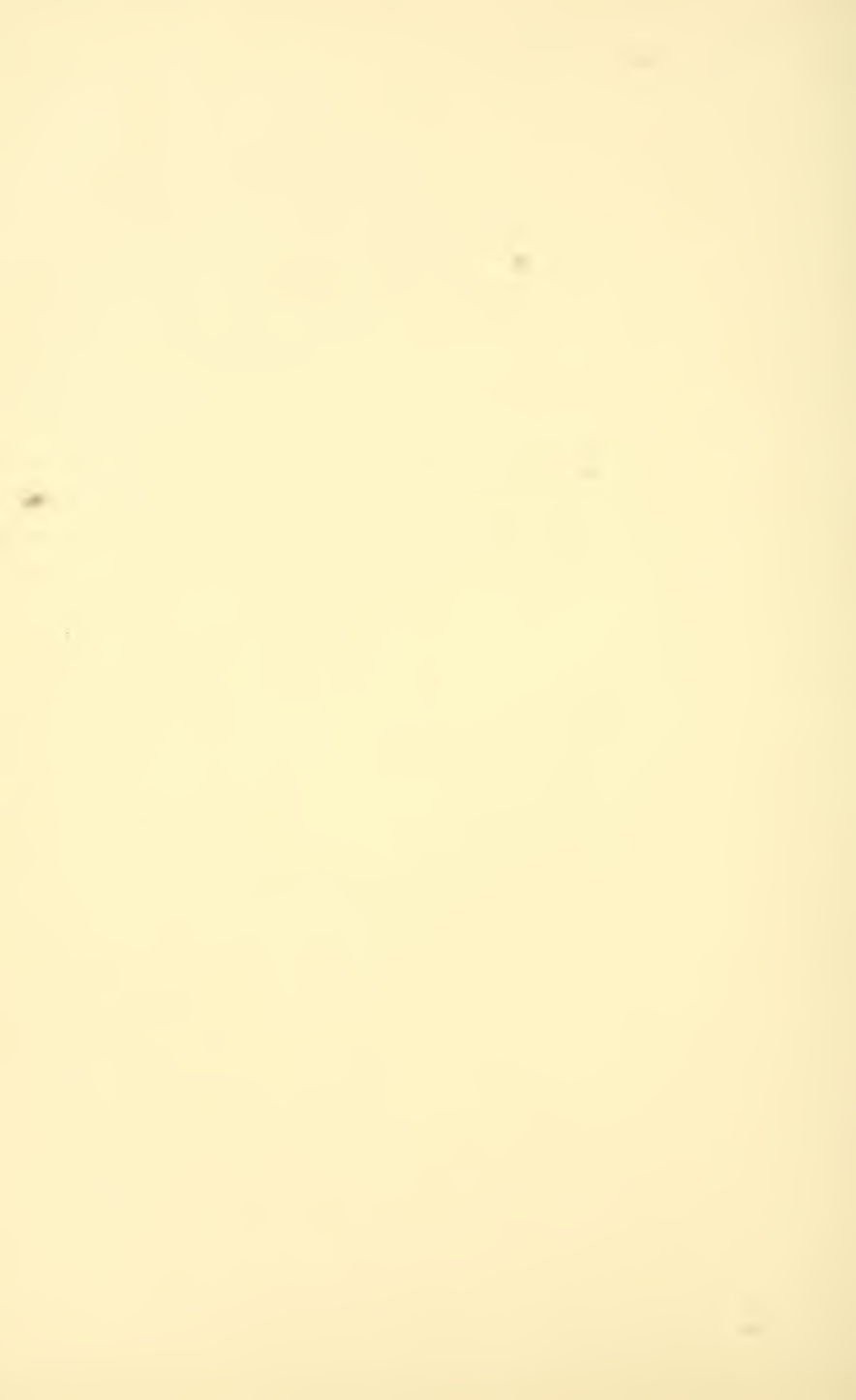
because his mother had taught him to pray in his baby days, and the words of his prayer were these :

“ Good God in Heaven watch over and keep me, and let the stars shine on me. Amen.”

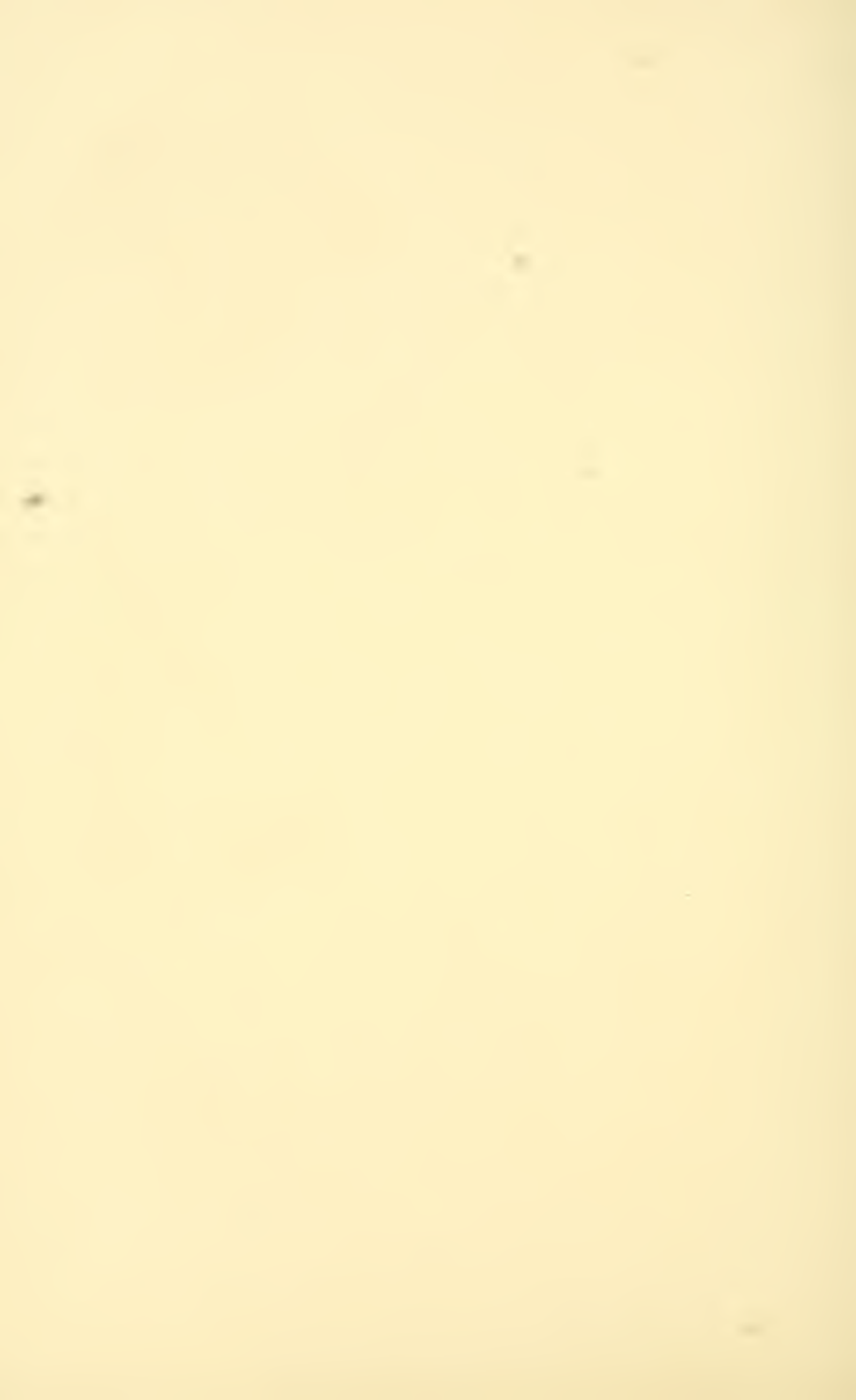
He had a vague idea it was lucky to be “ shined on ” by these bright, twinkling eyes of heaven. The window had a fascination for him, because of those wonderful worlds so far away and so mysterious. This night the wind blew in so chilly through the broken window panes, that he shivered, and with a last look at the piled up snow on the roofs around him, he crept to his poor bed, and wrapt the coat over his little numb limbs.

“ They say that Santa Claus goes over the roofs, I don’t wonder, there is no cops there and them’r reindeers of his ud be mighty awkward like to manage in a crowd. If I thought it one bit likely he’d come here by mistake, I’d sit up so’s to holler from my window, ‘ Hey, Mr. Santa Claus, come in this way, there’s two little kids in this’r house that wants to ask you if you knewd their mothers.’ ” This soliloquy

was followed by a deep sigh, and then the little voice added, "but I'd just love to get somethin' for my own, something to keep, something to love, like other young uns have that's got homes and fires and mothers and things," and then the little head was buried under the old coat, and perhaps it was only the wind moaning amid the snow covered chimney that the passing angel heard, but her face saddened, and she took it for the moan of a little child that was cold and hungry, and oh, so lonely, with nothing to love !



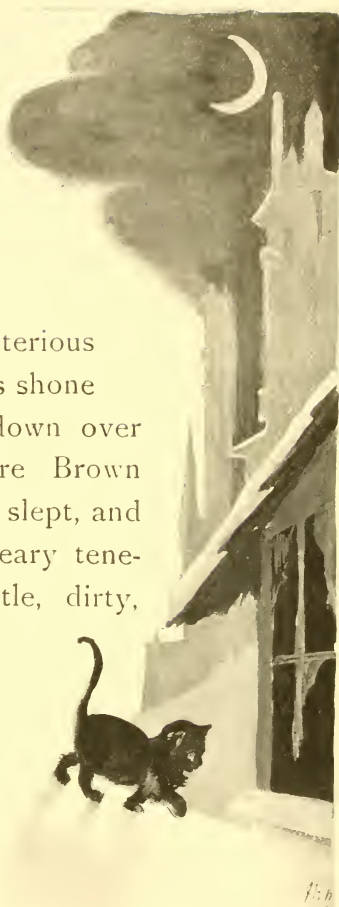
MOONLIGHT.



CHAPTER III.

MOONLIGHT.

WONDERFUL mysterious night. The stars shone peacefully on, smiling down over the happy home where Brown Eyes and Baby Dimple slept, and also upon the big, dreary tenement where a poor, little, dirty, tear-stained face lay almost smiling now in the unconsciousness of sleep. Hour after hour passed, no snow fell now, but that which had fallen became crisp, gleaming and glittering with frost diamonds. No pawing of reindeer, no merry



sleigh bells aroused little Flip, but while he slumbered heavily there were foot-falls on the roof above him. They were timid, light little steps, that hardly left their impress on the snow, and somehow they were guided straight to the eaves outside the broken garret window. Then they stopped, a face, frightened and hesitating, looked in. Was it safe in there? Should she venture? Perhaps the angel who heard and took to heaven the cry of that lonely little heart, for something to own and something to love, whispered, "Go in, you are wanted there." But whatever the impulse the decision was made, and out of the starlight and snow, a little black kitten bounded into the desolate attic.

Kitten eyes can see in the dark, and though the snow gleam had been brilliant, her bright eyes could scan every corner of the little, bare room. Walking noiselessly around on velvet cushioned paws, the little stranger felt at the mouse-holes with her whiskers, measured the length and breadth of the apartment, satis-

fied herself as to every detail, much as a tenant might when about to rent a new house, and then very cautiously approached the mattress on which little Flip slept heavily. Here pussy stopped short, hard regular breathing told of the sleeper's presence. Advancing gently, Flip's visitor took a long look at the pale face and matted red hair. A boy! Boys were dangerous. She remembered hearing her mother tell of boys tying tin cans to cat's tails, and also of their stoning unoffending members of her family, just for the pleasure of seeing them run and hearing their cries of pain. Yes, now that she thought of it, one of her own little sisters had come home with her pretty, front paw broken, and when her mother had licked it, and mewed and mewed with distress, she had heard her say, "Cruel, cruel boys, if we could be big and strong, and they weak and little, how many things they would wish they had never done."

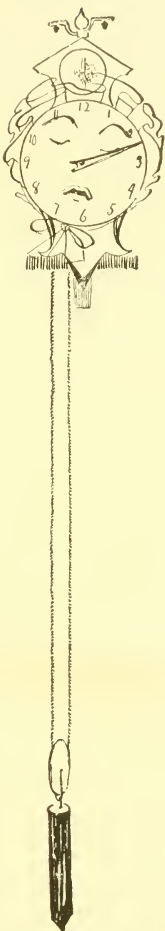
A boy! So in seeking a new home to shelter in out of the cold she had come to an

enemy. Pussy thought of going back to the patch of light, and springing once more through the broken window, but somehow, the little, thin pale face, smiling now in dream-land over the wonderful Christmas sights, reassured her. She made a circuit of the room again, looking for tin cans and stones, and finding none, she thought this boy must belong to a different species of boys and must be less dangerous. It was very cold, Pussy's paws ached from walking on the slippery frozen roofs, for she had come a long way, so she stepped deliberately on to the mattress and crawled under the coat. Oh ! that did feel better, and as she cuddled into the little sleeper's arms she could feel some welcome warmth, and in half a minute she was sound asleep.

The moon rose and traveled slowly through the cold, clear heavens ; stars smiled, sparkled and winked as if they were merry with happiness or wanted to keep the tears back, as they looked down on the many, many homes where Christmas was bringing joyful surprises, or

where poor little empty lives would know nothing of the glad day on wakening, but the fact that it was extremely cold.

Outside Baby Dimple's nursery the fir tree looked as if nature had decked it for Christmas, every branch and needle was glittering with frost crystals, and the lower limbs were bending beneath their heavy drapery of snow. Some cold and shivering sparrows that sat huddled behind the window shutters, and were too chilled to sleep, saw a pale clear moonbeam peep in at the window, from which little hands had the night before pulled back the heavy curtain. The room was very quiet save for the tick, tock, tick, tock of the solemn old clock, who was evidently talking in his sleep, for there is no sense in those words, and everybody knows that clocks can say very



sensible things and with great force and persistence, too, when they choose.

The moonbeam was rather curious about the big empty room, which was generally hidden behind the curtains, so she crept through the window pane, which moonbeams can do with great ease, and stretched out just as far as she could to scatter the shadows that hid all the mysteries she wanted to see.

“Dear me, dear me, who is this waking me up?” said a voice somewhat wheezy and muffled by reason of the many wrappings that enveloped its owner. “After all the jolting, bumping and disrespectful treatment I have received these last days, I did expect a little peace and quiet.”

“Who are you?” shouted four-and-twenty tiny little voices together, and the moonbeam turned away from the big, paper-wrapped first speaker, to gleam on the warlike regiment of lead soldiers standing at “attention” on a chair from the back of which dangled a stocking labeled in big print characters “Brown Eyes.”

“Who am I? Can't you see? Are you also wrapped in this senseless paper, poor things! I am a pi-bald horse with real hair, and long mane, and my harness takes off, and I am far too handsome to be covered up in this miserable fashion.”

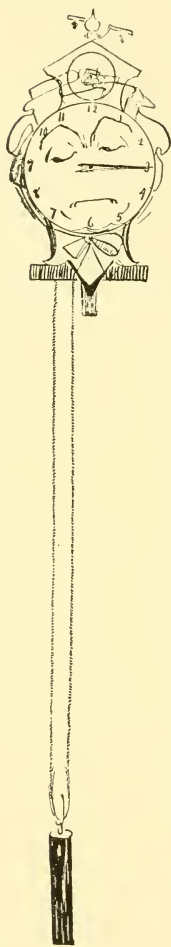
“Ba-a, I can sympathize,” cried a lamblike voice close by. “I am suffering from the same discomfort and I can't see any light, so I did not wake up until you spoke crossly. Suppose you stop talking.”

“They pulled the paper off my eyes to see if I looked all right and I can't sleep any more, because there is such a strange, white light moving about the room, it makes me nervous,” responded the horse, in very wide-awake accents.

A heavy sigh broke from the lips of a doll that lay in a pretty white bed. “I wish I might look at you all, but I can't open my eyes until my new mother comes and picks me up, and I am so anxious to see her.”

Moonbeam smiled as she lit up the pretty face with its masses of fair, curly hair,

and then she glided away and peeped at parcel after parcel piled on the two little chairs and standing around them on the floor.



“I guess my friend Sunbeam will want to be early awake tomorrow to see all Santa Claus’ wonderful work, for if I mistake not this is where his little friends live, and he will want to be in at the fun, when dolls wake up, soldiers march, and horses have a chance to show off their high spirits.” So saying, Moonbeam turned and softly the pale light faded away, darkness hushed the strange group into stillness again, while the drowsy old clock, half aroused and not in the best humor, said imperatively, “don’t, talk; don’t, talk; don’t, talk.” The doll shuddered at this strange voice, the horse snorted, the soldiers stood

at “attention,” ready to fire at the word of

command, but as they were all in a strange place, they thought it wisest and safest to obey the mysterious voice that went ticking on, "don't, talk ; don't talk ; don't talk."

It was not so very long after that a sound in her room aroused mother. She was in a moment wide-awake. It was a funny little tapping on the bars of the small cot at her side. It was Baby Dimple's signal, very soft and gentle so as not to wake papa, but mother always heard it at once, and it meant, "Are you awake, mother dear ? I am."

"Hush, Baby dear," whispered mother, "it is too early to wake up."

"Oh, but I can't go to sleep again. I really can't. I am too 'cited. Please, mother, let me come into your bed and cuddle, because it is Christmas day."

"All right, sweetheart," mother answered, and a warm little figure climbed over the dividing bars and cuddled snugly into mother's arms. A loud purr showed that Snowball was also awake, and he immediately left the deserted cot and curled himself upon mother's feet.

"Now, mother, tell me a story, whisper, papa won't hear. Tell me a story about Christmas," said Baby Dimple, after hugs enough had been given to take mother's breath away.

"Mother's too sleepy, Sweet, to tell stories, suppose we both pretend we are asleep, and see who can lay still the longest time."

A ripple of laughter quickly smothered under the clothes showed that Baby Dimple was not to be tempted back to dreamland.

"Oh you lazy, lazy mother, you want to go to sleep again, but I can't let you. Do please keep awake, or I'll wake papa, for I must have some one to talk to."

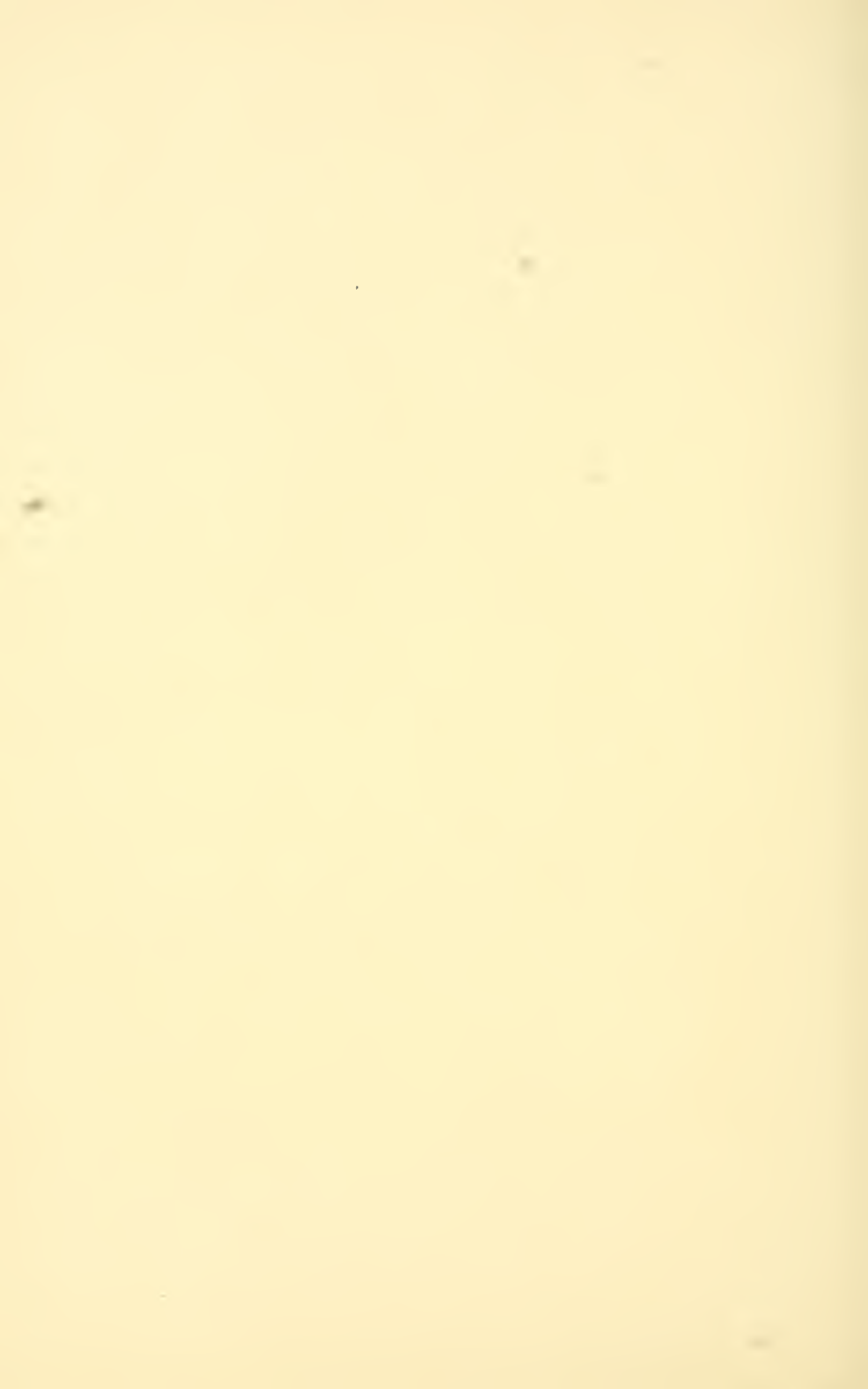
A sigh from the mother brought a shower of kisses, and then the coaxing little voice began again.

"Tell me what you did when you woke up on Christmas day, long, long ago, when you were a little girl."

"All right, Baby dear. I will, only keep your toes still, and don't whisper loud. When I was a little girl I lived in a big house

"LONG AGO WHEN YOU WERE A LITTLE GIRL."





in a very big city, and it was always dark when I woke up. I had a very, very dear sister, your Aunt Florrie, and we slept in the same room, but our beds were at opposite sides of the room, and we hung up our stockings on either side of the mantelpiece."

"Oh! you didn't put them in the nursery like Brown Eyes and I do. Why didn't you?"

"Because our dear father and mother slept in another room, and we could have all the fun we wanted without waking them, and of course, you and Brown Eyes want your things where you can open them at the same time, don't you?"

"Go on, go on," said Baby Dimple, forgetting in her impatience the prohibition about the wriggling of the little pink toes.

"Well, when we woke up, we used to wake each other, and then we would feel in the dark for our stockings, and empty them out, and as there were always prunes and figs and nuts, I am afraid any one listening would have heard a great munching and crunching."

"Funny mother, it must have sounded like

monkeys. Did you crack the nuts with your teeth?"

"Yes, I am afraid we did," answered mother reluctantly.

"Then why don't you let me do it?" came the answer quick as a flash.

"Because mother loves those precious little teeth better than she did her own."

Baby Dimple had to accept this answer, so she merely added, "Go on."

"Well when it got nearly daylight, we used to slip out of bed and into the hall, and near to our mother's room door. We used to sing a carol. It was generally 'Hark, the Herald Angels Sing' and then——" mother's voice faltered and stopped.

"Then what?" said Baby Dimple, and the little feet beat an impatient tattoo, for she did not like pauses and stops in stories.

"Then, the door would open, and my mother would come out, the sweetest and dearest mother, and she would kiss us and smile such a lovely smile, and her dear blue eyes would be so tender."

“What’s that on your cheek? Oh, mother, don’t do that, you’ll make me cry. What makes you cry, when you are telling me stories?”

“Because, Baby dear, I miss that sweet mother so, and I seemed almost to see her again, as I thought of long ago days.”

“Oh, I know,” said a soft, little voice, “Jesus wanted her. I hope He has no more room in Heaven just now. He’ll have to do with the angels and prophets and other folks, ’cause I can’t let him have *my* mother. Let’s talk about something else! This makes me sad.”

The Star Spangled Banner, rendered in most lively spirits with an accompaniment drummed on the wall, here gave evidence that Brown Eyes was awake, and very much awake.

“Come in, darling,” called mother, and that was the signal for attack on poor, sleepy papa. Baby Dimple rolled over and took possession of his head, rumped his hair, kissed his nose, shouting “wake up” in the

most deafening fashion in his ear. Brown Eyes flew in from the next room, and proceeded to make a war horse of his unfortunate father, a proceeding which resulted just as he wished, for after papa had grumbled and growled without avail, he was thoroughly aroused, pulled up, helped into his dressing gown, and two excited little figures danced before him while mother carried the lamp that lighted the way to the nursery.

Sunbeam had not been able to get up early enough, so he did not see the joy and excitement, nor hear the laughter and exclamations that resounded through the nursery, making cheery music that Christmas morning. When he did peep in some hours later, he smiled to see the radiant joy of his two little friends, dancing hither and thither with flushed faces and tumbled hair amid their Christmas gifts, the most conspicuous of which were a new sled, a pi-bald horse, a doll that would go to sleep, and a regiment of very aggressive soldiers.

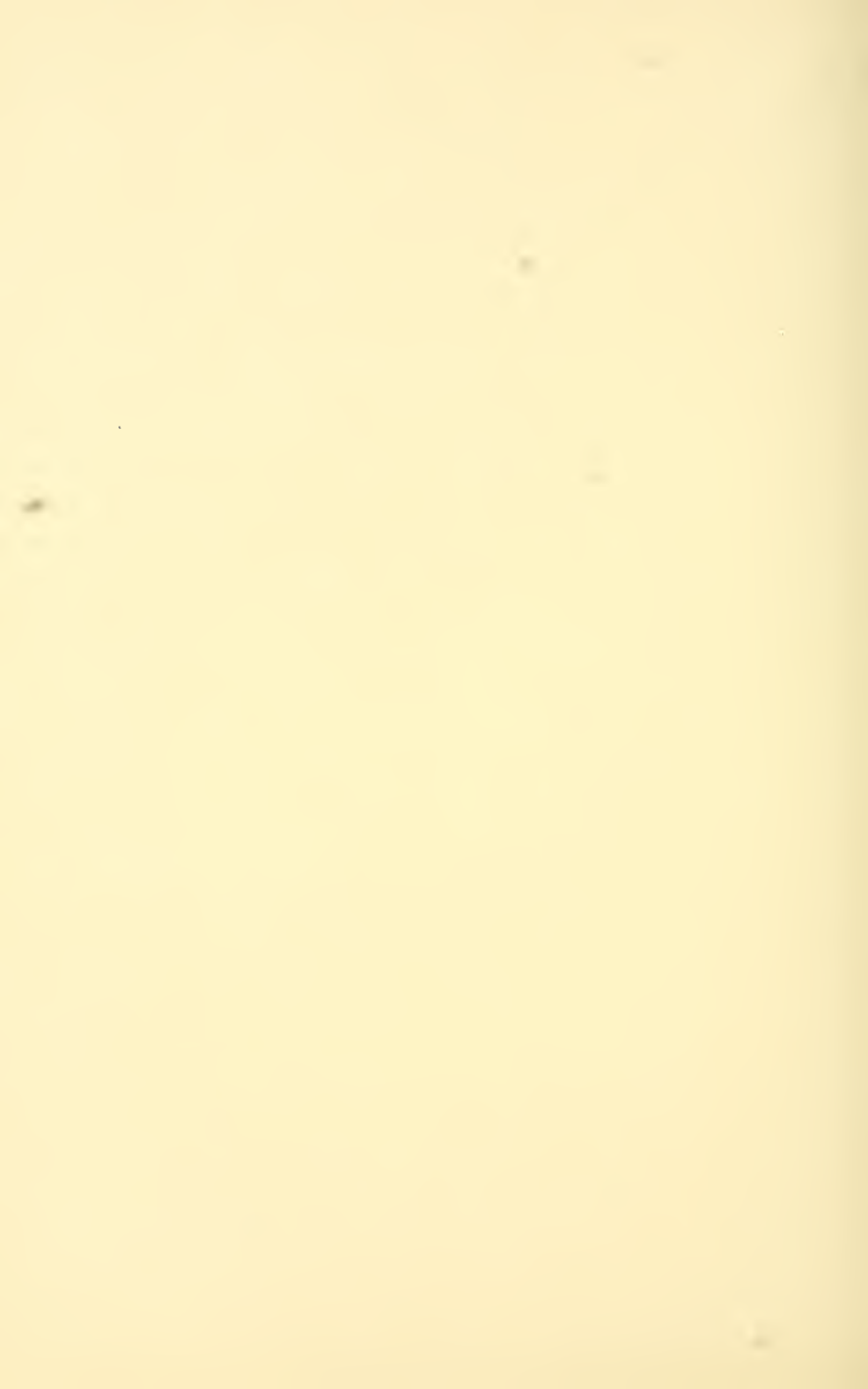
But Sunbeam does not only seek out the

happy scenes, his sweet, cheering smile falls also amid the need, and heart ache ; the hunger and cold of the great city's poor. At about the same hour that morning, a sunbeam stole through the broken attic window of little Flip's home, and caressed the pale pinched face that would receive no mother's kisses, playing in the tangled hair, that would feel no tender, soothing touch. Flip's eyes, and they were his best feature, clear, steady bright and blue, opened suddenly and blinked at the sunshine.

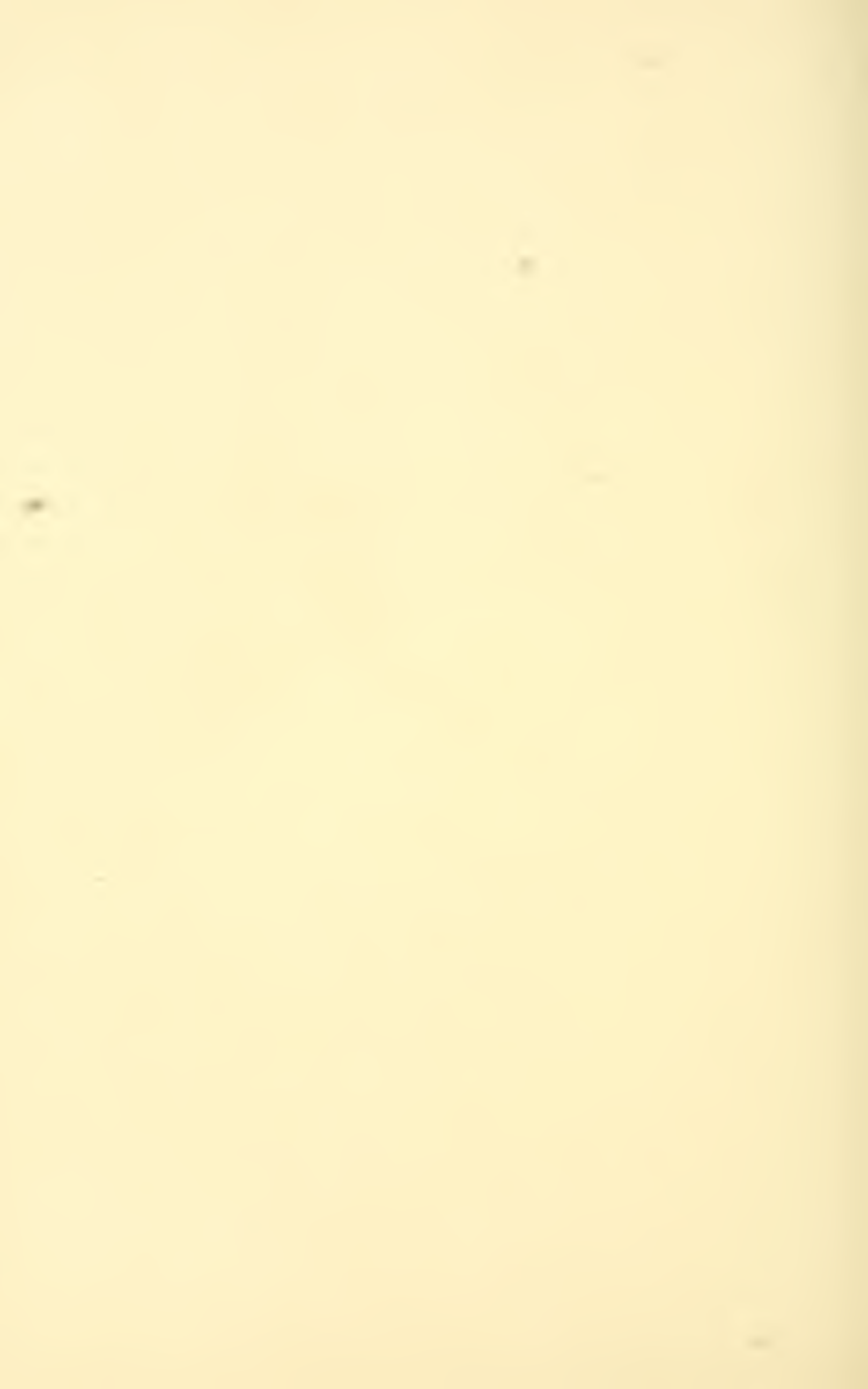
“ Whew ! ain't it cold ! ” he exclaimed aloud, and it was cold. The child's breath could be seen like a white column of steam on the chill atmosphere, and the old coat all around his face had an icy rim, where it had frozen in the night. As he moved a strange sound fell on his ear, and a queer vibration thrilled him. Purr, pur-r, pur-r-r, pur-r-r it went steadily on. The astonished boy wondered what mystery this could be. As full wakefulness returned, he became aware of something very warm and soft, cuddling close to his tattered shirt.

“Ha! ha! What has Mr. Santa Claus been up to? I believe I have really got something after all.” He raised the old coat, and immediately a little, black velvet paw was thrust out and laid with a sleepy cat-stretching action on his face. Flip waited a minute and then peeped again. Such a dear little kitten face looked up at him, and in a moment the small creature was rubbing the back of its head on his chin, purring as if it had been a diminutive alarm clock set going. The love and confidence was mutual from the first moment. When puss was saying to herself, “I am glad I came here, I’ll be happy with this boy, he isn’t the tin can kind,” Flip was saying aloud, “If Mr. Santa Claus didn’t bring it, it comed through the window anyhow, that’s sure. P’raps the stars saw I wanted something to love. I guess anyhow, we’ll be chums and stick together, won’t we, puss?” And pussy for answer rolled out such sonorous purr purrs that they tickled Flip’s chest, and a hearty peal of child laughter rang out in the old attic, that made the sunbeams dance and the shadows tremble.

Had better, brighter days begun for little
Flip this Christmas day? Perhaps so. It
takes so little to lift the burden from a child's
heart, and to bring in sweet hope to chase
away the clouds of gloom and sorrow.



LOVELIGHT.



CHAPTER

LOVELIGHT.



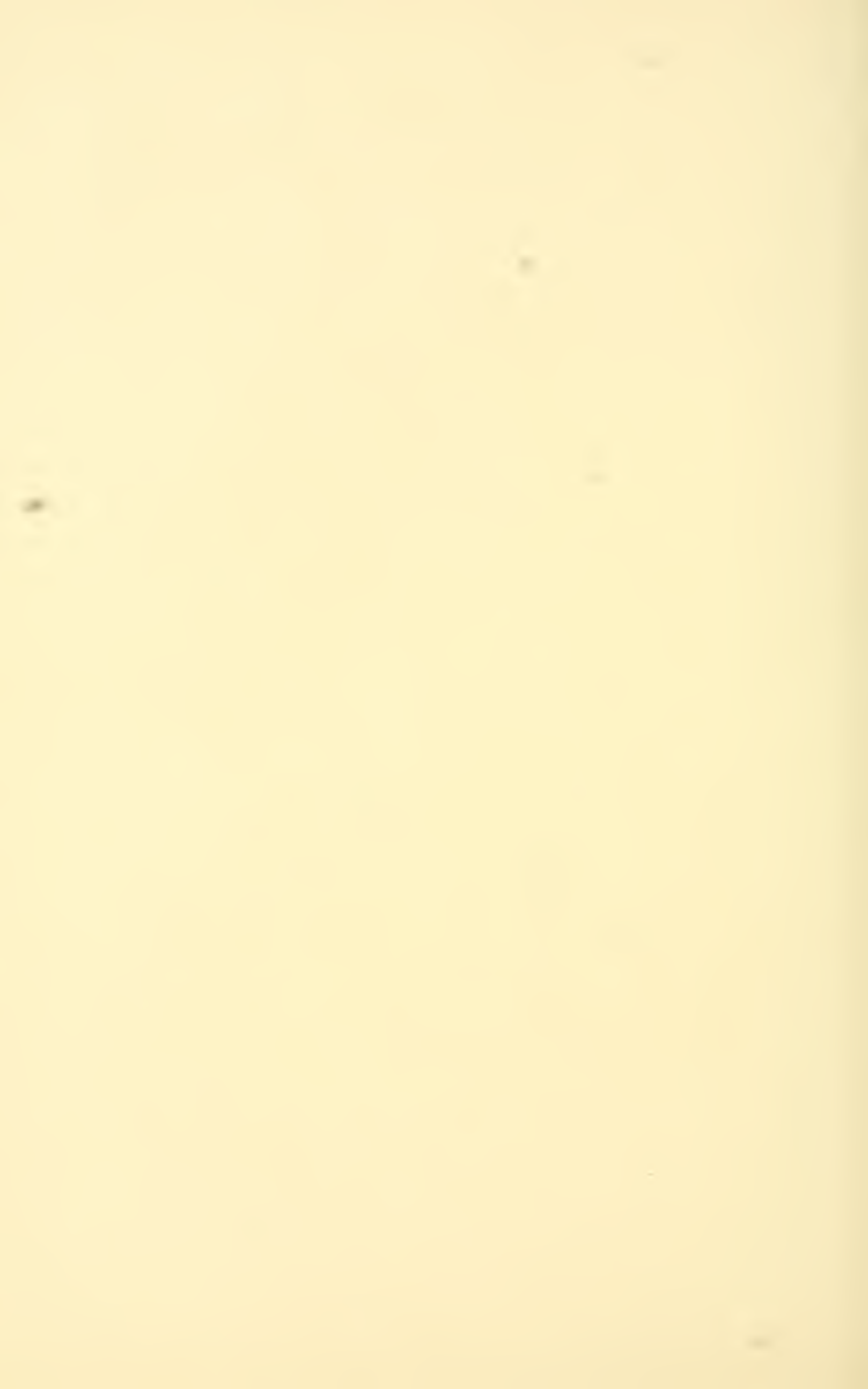
SOME weeks had passed since Christmas,—cold, snowy weeks. A certain new “Flexible Flyer” had gone many a time coasting merrily down the hill, bearing two little figures muffled in furry coats, who sat bravely enthroned upon the sled that raced so smoothly o’er the frozen surface, and sometimes

dumped them into a snow drift, from which they emerged more rosy and laughing than ever. Mother had watched them from the window, and seen them stand in the middle of the road, waiting for passing coal wagons or grocery teams, and then Brown Eyes' clear voice would be heard earnestly asking a question, which was generally answered by a good natured nod of the head, and in a most businesslike way she would see her little boy hitch on to the sled, with the little white queen still calmly enthroned behind the lumbering wagon, to start again for the ascent of the hill. At first mother felt like calling her darlings away from these dangers, but she checked the impulse as she said to herself, "Boys will be boys, why spoil the fun, no harm will come to my darlings."

How bright the fire seemed as it crackled and danced those winter evenings. The home was like a little nest to the hearts that loved it, and while they heard the wind moan and howl without they saw the thermometer drop down, down, down, till the ground crackled



" SHE DID NOT LOOK THIN AND COLD."



and snapped, while the trees were sheathed in a glittering armor of ice.

The streets were very dreary and comfortless in the great city ; little bare feet suffered cruelly, and somehow people preferred to buy their papers in the ferry house, or at the " L " road station, than on the street corners where the wind cut your face and nipped your fingers as you hunted for the necessary cent that never could be found at the right moment. So it came about one night, that heavy of heart little Flip climbed the stairs to his attic that was to be home no more to him. He had no money for rent, as all available pennies were needed for food, and they were few enough for that at times, as his thin little face told too plainly.

When he opened the door, the old coat moved and out peeped a little black face, which was soon followed by the bounding body, scampering paws and alert tail of the lively, romping kitten, as she sprang to meet him with a happy mew of welcome. She did not look thin and cold as did her little master,

her jet-black coat was very glossy, her white shirt front as white as much licking could make it, and her whole, frisky little body well kept and comfortable. However few the pennies, some always went to buy pussy milk, and then young as she was, she was a fine hunter, and caught both sparrows on the roof, and mice in the broken down tenement. She brought them sometimes very proudly to her little master, and perhaps wondered in her pussy-cat mind, why he did not eat her hard sought for game, and preferred, hungry as he was, to munch his hard crusts while she grew fat on these delicacies.

“Puss, I guess it’s all up with us,” said little Flip as they cuddled together under the old coat, “we’re out on the streets for good to-morrow. It’s colder than this out there, besides, the cops won’t let us sleep long. It’ll be ‘wake up, move on, get out’ however tired we are, but I guess we’ll stick together, won’t we, little un?” Pussy, who troubled her head but very little about to-morrow, purred happy, contented acquiescence

and the two went to sleep, while the pitying stars looked down and winked sadly, and perhaps some guardian angel kissed in passing the weary little face that had no other caresses than those of the rough little tongue, that could not express all its loving devotion plainly enough in the feeble word "mew."

It rained Saturday morning. Mother entered the nursery with a telegram in her hand that had just changed her plans for the day. "Why, darlings, what is the matter?" No wonder she asked, the usually sunshiny little faces were clouded. Brown Eyes was idly drumming on the window, and Baby Dimple sat disconsolately in the middle of the room, with a tear-stained face and blue eyes that looked listlessly at her pi-bald horse who stood neglected in a corner, with his night blanket still hiding the beauties of his parti-colored coat.

"Baby won't play marbles, and I'm sick of dolls and horses," said Brown Eyes.

"I don't like marbles, and there's nothing else to play with and nothing to do," added the disconsolate little girl.

“ Oh, my darlings, how can you make yourselves so unhappy. Why think of the new dolls, and horses, and soldiers, and paints, and bricks that Santa Claus brought, and think of the dear old toys, to say nothing of Snow-ball and Lion, and the comfort of your warm, cosy nursery. I am afraid the naughty little spirit of discontent has crept in down the chimney, and entered two little hearts, where only joy and love should reign.”

“ We’ve played and played with our toys and there’s nothing new to do with them,” grumbled Brown Eyes, while Baby Dimple actually kicked the offending marbles under the lounge with an impatient little foot, that wanted to vent the feelings of a discontented little heart.

“ Oh, children !” said mother, with pain in her voice as she gathered two rather unwilling and struggling little bodies into her arms, “ I am afraid you have too many toys and too much of happiness to understand its value. Think of the poor little boys and girls who have nothing, no toys, no nice home, and some

of them, no mothers to love and cuddle them."

"I don't want to hear about them, it makes me sad, don't tell me any more," cried Baby Dimple, with a stamp of the foot, for she could not bear to have her feelings worked upon, and Brown Eyes, by way of changing the subject, said, "Mother, come and make popcorn with us, you said you would."

"Sweetheart, mother can't, she has just got a message from the doctor and must hurry to the city, to see some one who is very sick in the hospital, and wants her."

"Take me with you," coaxed Brown Eyes.

"Me, too," pleaded Baby Dimple.

"She will, she will," shouted Brown Eyes. "I see she's thinking about it," and the little figure that had drooped a moment before with dejection danced wildly round her chair.

Yes, mother was thinking. "Perhaps my happy, sheltered little lambs might be the better for it, if they saw something of the suffering and need, and were made to think of others after all the joy of their own holiday

season." So at last she said, "Yes, you shall go," and shouts of joy told that the spirit of discontent had had to scramble back up the chimney, where, we will hope, he got well smoked and roasted for daring to come down and do his evil work in the angel of love's domain.

Some hours later two little figures walked



solemnly hand in hand down the long marble lined corridors of a great city hospital. Baby Dimple's face was sad and wistful; Brown Eyes was silent,

and held the little white mittened hand of his sister in a firm, manly grip. Mother walked a few paces behind talking with a sweet faced nurse about the patient, whose bedside she had just left. The visit had been a long one, and the struggle for waning life not one for child-eyes to watch, so the little ones had

been divested of furry caps and coats, and had then been allowed to wander from cot to cot in the children's ward. Little thin fingers had clasped their sturdy, dimpled hands; great, sad, weary eyes had searched the depths of their own blue and brown ones, to find in them depths of wondering sympathy.

"Nurse, why can't that little boy get up and play?" or "Why can't that little girl sit up?" from their questioning lips would bring the answer, "Because he has hurt his back and for months has had to lie still," or "She is too weak, dearie, she has come from a very poor home, and has had so little care and food, that she has been too sick to raise herself in bed since she came here." A lump was gathering in Brown Eyes' throat, and Baby Dimple's eyes were full of tears when mother joined them.

At sight of the arms in whose embrace she always cried out her grief, the little girlie could hold out no longer, and running to meet her she clung to mother's hand, hiding her flushed, troubled face in her dress.

"Take me home, I'm so sad," she sobbed.

"There are such lots of poor little children with no mothers. I can't bear it, I can't bear it."

"Mother," said Brown Eyes in a husky voice, "I want to come again. I've promised my new soldiers to that little boy with the crutches, and my paints to the one sitting up in bed. He says he loves to paint."

"They can have my dolls and horse and all my things," sobbed Baby Dimple, "but they don't want them. They wants mothers, things can't help them, but they can't have my mother. I can't give her away, I can't, I can't."

It had taken some time to still the tempest, and the kind nurses had assured both children that toys and flowers did give the sick, little ones lots of fun and enjoyment, and that they loved them very much, and nursed and comforted them just as mothers would. Then mother, herself, whispered in the little pink ear, "Baby, mine, God gave you your mother for your own and you need never give her up. She can never belong to anybody else quite as

she belongs to you and Brown Eyes." So the tears were wiped away, but there was a sad, little smile on Baby Dimple's face as she kissed her hand to the children who watched them depart with wistful eyes.

At the end of the long corridor, mother stopped to finish her talk, while the two little figures turned the corner and found themselves at the main entrance of the big building. Then they paused and stood gazing at a group before them. On the steps sat a little boy, ragged and unkempt. His face had evidently been recently washed, but there was a clearly defined line over which the water had not reached, and the tangled, red hair had certainly known little of the use of either comb or brush. His whole figure spoke eloquently of sorrow and bewilderment, and the tears fell with a rapidity that kept his sleeve busy brushing them away, for he seemed half ashamed of these signs of grief. By him stood one of the young doctors of the staff, with a kindly hand laid on his shoulder.

"I am very sorry for you, my little lad.

It's hard, I know. If we had known where to find you, we would have sent for you when he was taken worse. The people at the tenement from which your father came, said you had moved and they couldn't tell us where you were."

"I guess they couldn't, I haven't been nowhere, 'cause I couldn't pay rent, but I sorter anchored by father, I thought as he'd come out some day and then we'd take a room again."

"Poor little chap, it's hard, but if he had lived he never could have walked again."

"Five days dead and buried, did they say?" murmured the boy, "well he was allers unlucky, but I guess he's the lucky one this time and I'se the one who ain't got no luck." A sob rose with uncontrollable bitterness from the aching little heart.

Baby Dimple had planted herself directly in front of the sobbing boy, had listened to the dialogue and kept back her tears as long as she could. A second tempest broke, and a little white, avenging angel flung herself

against the doctor. "Go away, you cruel, wicked man, you made him cry." Two mit-tened fists beat wildly against his knees, while an irrational commanding little voice cried, "His father mustn't be dead, you sha'n't make him cry, I'll tell my mother of you."

"Sweetheart, sweetheart, what are you doing?" asked mother, bewildered and surprised at the scene, as she seized the little white fury in her arms.

The doctor's kind voice said cheerily, "It's all right, the little one's feelings are hurt. She thought I was the cause of the little chap's sorrow."

They turned to the boy on the steps, and there by his side sat Brown Eyes with a loving arm around his neck, giving what child comfort he could. "It ain't that, I know father don't feel nothin' now and p'raps he's all right, but now I don't b'long to no one."

"Where's your home?" asked Brown Eyes.

"Hain't got no home."

"Who takes care of you?"

"Takes care of myself."

“Where do you sleep?”

“Nowhere, anywhere,” answered the city waif.

“Well,” said Brown Eyes, “I’ve got a home, come home with me.”

Flip stared at him. The Doctor interrupted saying, “I’ll look after him, my little man.”

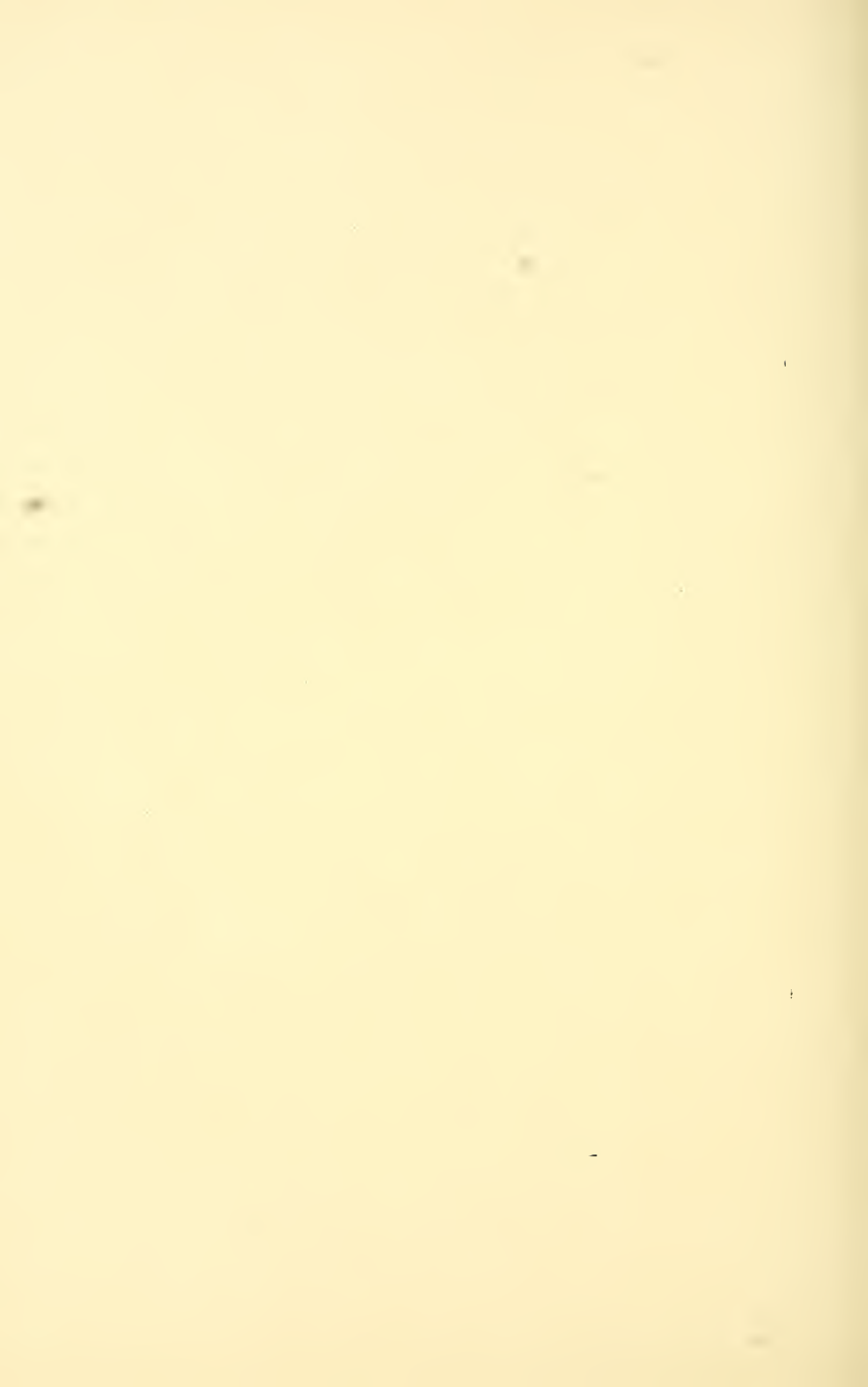
But mother leant over and said, “Brown Eyes, you may take him home if he will come,” and then drawing the doctor aside to learn the particulars, she left the boys to settle the question together, and Baby Dimple offered her own inducements at intervals.

“You shall see my new horse; we’ve got a big fire in the nursery; there’re going to be pan-cakes for supper; mother’ll tell us a story before we go to bed, only, I can’t give you my mother because God gave her to me and Brown Eyes only. I’ll let my white cat sleep with you, if you are very lonely, ’cause God took your father.”

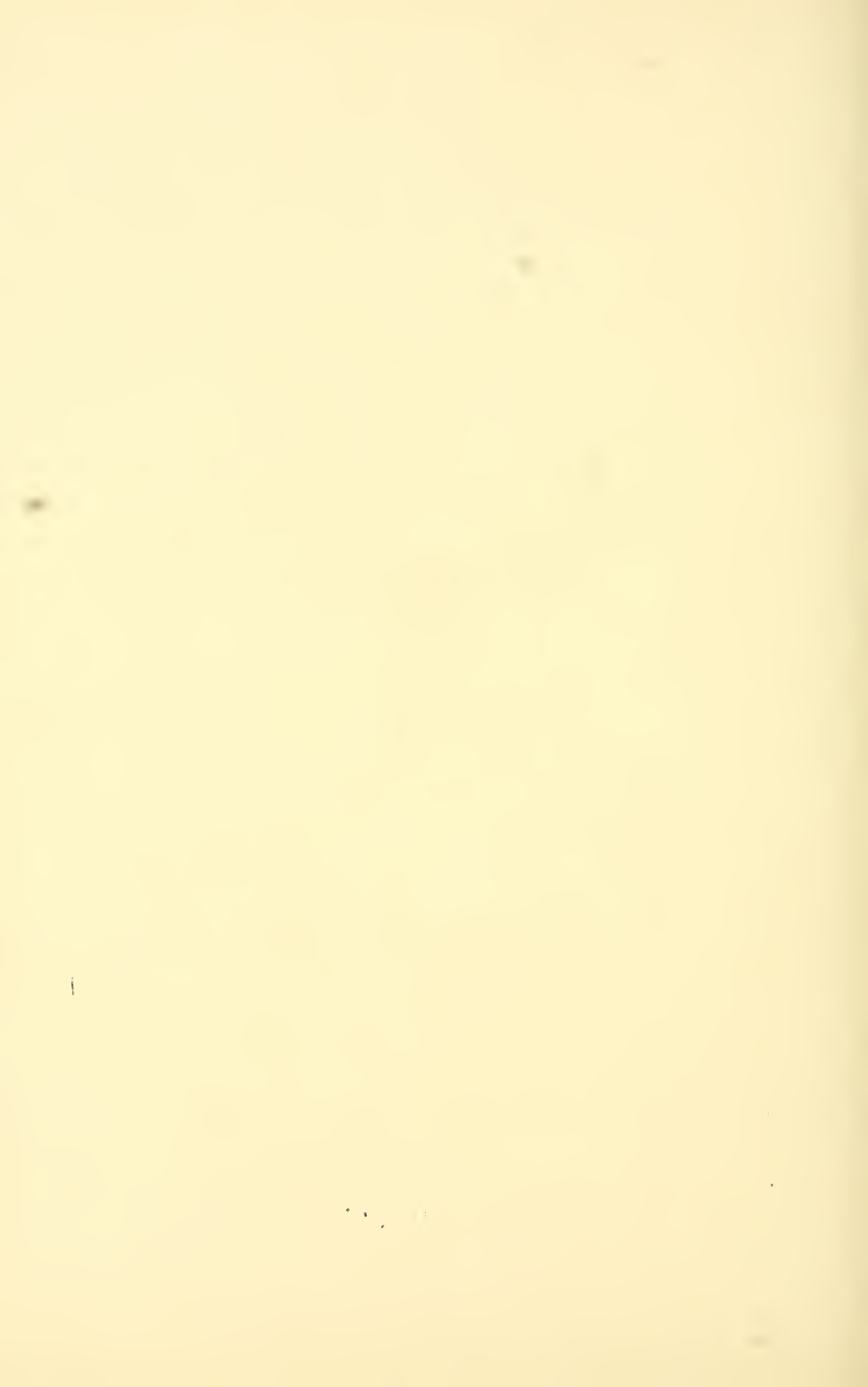
This struck a chord of response and Flip’s white teeth gleamed in a broad smile. “I’ve

got a cat, too ; it's here, I was going to show it to father, it's all I've got in the world," and he gently opened his coat to show a very sleepy kitten, cuddled closely to him, and evidently very well satisfied with its place of shelter. "I'll go, and like to go, if I may take her along with me," was the answer to mother's question as to whether Brown Eyes' guest was coming with them.

So the whole party started off, our little boy proudly holding the cold, dirty hand of his newly found friend, while Baby Dimple followed with mother, talking excitedly of the darling black kitten, and wondering what Snowball would say to "his company" when they got home.



HOMELIGHT.



CHAPTER V.

HOMELIGHT.

IT was quite dark when the little party neared home ; the crisp, hard snow crunched under their feet, and three merry voices rang



out clear on the night air. Brown Eyes whistled a signal, and Lion's deep voice answered in a moment. The doors of the house were

thrown open, and in the stream of friendly light stood papa's tall figure. The big dog bounded into the snow to meet them, with as much vigor as if he had been one of his ancestors leaving the Mt. St. Bernard convent to seek belated travelers.

"Hello, my runaways, where have you been?" cried papa, and then as the little party emerged from the darkness, he gave vent to a long whistle of surprise and exclamation, "why, mother, what have you brought me home now?" Baby Dimple was the first to volunteer the asked for information, which she did while hugging the father into whose arms she had flung herself, the moment she could reach him.

"It's Flip, papa dear, and he's Brown Eyes' company, but he's going to play with me too, and he's got a cat, a black one." Papa's eyes had sought mother's, and she had telegraphed the message, "I'll tell you about it later." So papa patted the little waif on the shoulder with the cheery words, "Glad to see you, Flip, my boy; come in and get warm."

But Flip was not allowed to enter the door that papa threw open.

“To the nursery, to the nursery,” Brown Eyes cried, one pulling while the other pushed. They hurried Flip upstairs. “Mercy on us,” cried nurse as the trio rushed into the bright room where she was calmly darning stockings. Mother’s warning finger raised at the door checked the next words, and called nurse back to talk about putting supper back, and getting the bath room ready for immediate use.

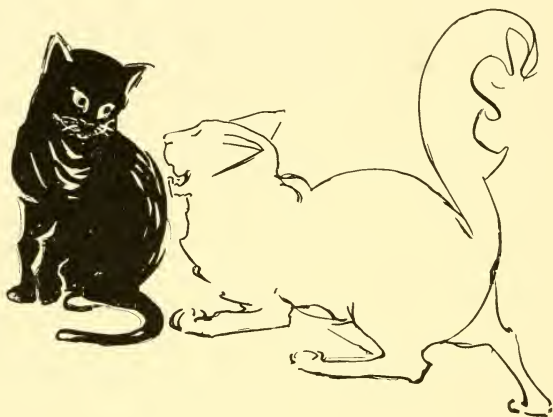
In the middle of the red rug that fronted the nursery fire, sat Snowball. He had just had his supper and completed a carefully made toilet, so that every part of his graceful body was in perfect trim, while his plummy tail stretched out on the rug looked like a downy boa for a lady’s opera cloak.

“Let’s all sit down on the rug,” said Brown Eyes, “and see what Snowball’ll say to the company we’ve brought him.”

“Yes, yes, let’s see,” echoed Baby Dimple, who though she had left baby talk behind in

the years that had passed, was still the little echo of her brother.

The three children seated themselves by the stately white cat; slowly and cautiously the ragged coat was opened, but with a frisky energy, out sprang the plebeian kitten right



under the angora's aristocratic nose. What a picture it was! The little black kitten startled and dazed by the light and warmth, and a great white prince of a cat towering over her. Snowball was frozen into an attitude of horror at the unexpected apparition. Every hair stood erect and his back looked like a

deformed hunch, while his yellow eyes flashed fire.

“Naughty, naughty, Snowball,” called Baby, when the cats had gazed at each other for a full minute. “It’s little, and it’s cold, and it’s hungry.”

Whatever he thought of Baby’s reproof, Snowball did think it was time to act, and like a flash the white paw darted at the offending kitten’s ear, and I am ashamed to say he spit most crossly in its frightened little face, then at one bound he sprang to the mantelpiece and sat there growling. The children looked dismayed ; the little kitten stood looking up at its unsociable host with a sweet, questioning little face, uttering mild little mews of protest in answer to his thunderous growls.

Then Brown Eyes’ wrath broke, and folding the kitten in loving arms, he addressed Snowball indignantly. “You bad, ungentlemanly, ill-natured cat, I am surprised at you, petted and cuddled and fed on good things, you turn and spit at a poor little kitten, who only looked up in your face and asked you to love

it. We'll go away and leave you. You can stay there, and we'll get a saucer of cream for this kitten who is far nicer than you, cross cat, bad cat, we'll leave you to yourself," and out of the nursery trooped the children, bearing the kitten who was at once to be regaled on cream to heal its wounded spirits. Left to himself, Snowball repented, but alas the door was shut. The merry voices that sounded through the house had in them no call for him. He descended from his citadel and went to read lessons in the fire, while through the still room sounded again the voice of his taunting enemy, that hateful clock, the words of which his conscience could so well interpret, "cross, cat ; bad, cat ; cross, cat ; bad, cat." With drooping tail and dejected head bent, Snowball crept into the cupboard, and there got away from the accusing voice and went to sleep, not without bitter heart burnings, however, over the new rival that seemed so much more formidable than the green-eyed monkey.

Mother had come on the children as they left the nursery, and had delayed their descent

on the kitchen, by insisting that Flip come with her first, to experience the joys of soap and water. She had opened a big bundle of clothing that had been gathered from friends for the city poor, and a little pile was waiting on the chair for Flip's use. It was hard to part the children at the bath room door, but then Brown Eyes and Baby Dimple promised to sit and wait during the forthcoming ablutions, to shout comfort and encouragement through the door.

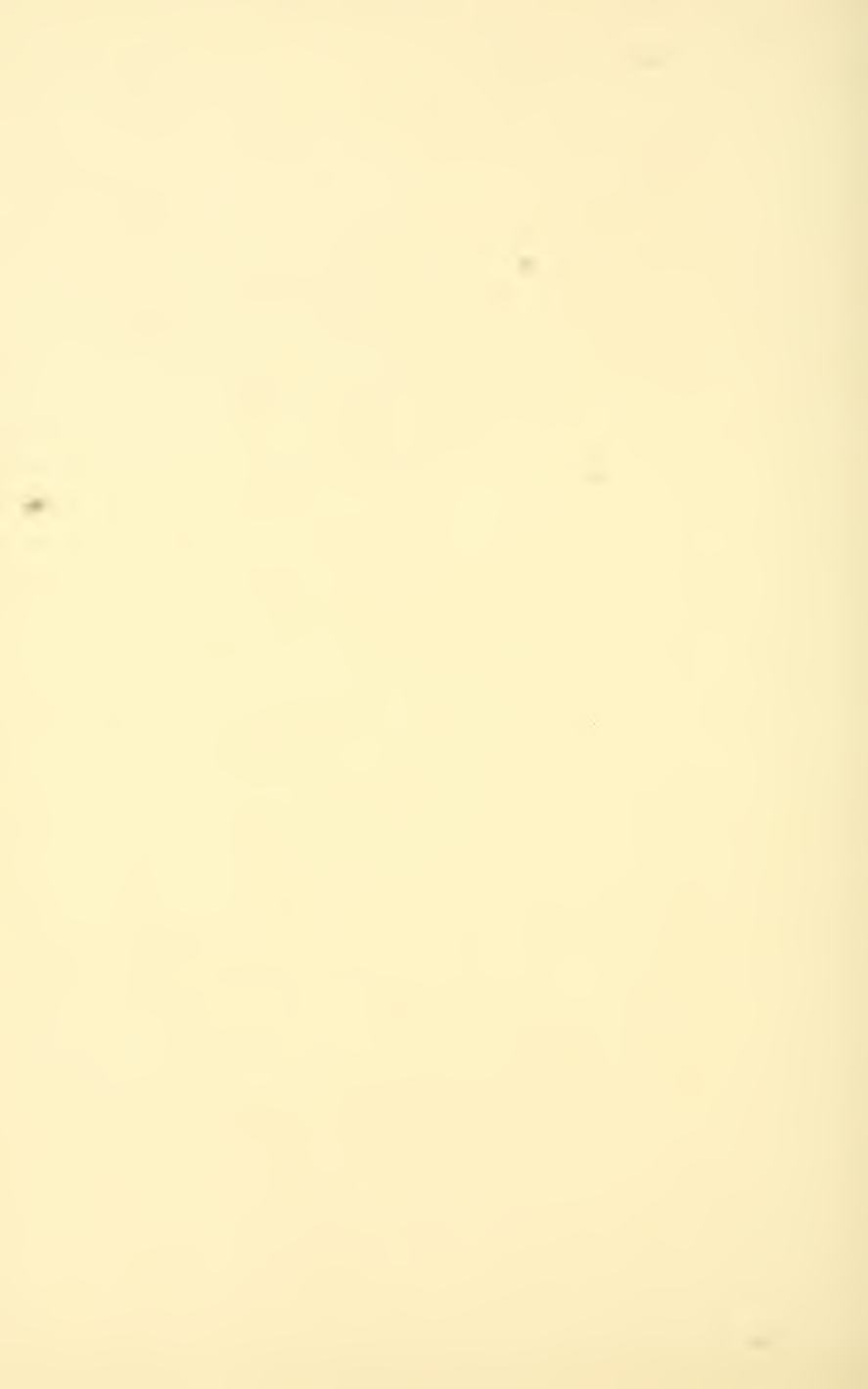
Baby Dimple seated herself with the black kitten in her arms, and her parting to Flip was characteristic. "I'm going to listen and see if you are brave or if you cry when the soap goes in your eyes." Brown Eyes added, "I tell you, Flip, mother is the one to give a bath, she just knows how to do it, you'll hardly know yourself when you come out." At which the little chap looked very crestfallen over the awful ordeal before him. The children listened for a long time to the sound of soaping and splashing, while steamy, soapy atmosphere seemed to filter through every crack. Then they

began drumming on the door and said, "Hurry up, mother, I am sure he is clean enough; don't wriggle, Flip, mother says that makes her longer," and then with a hope of much hastening matters, the two, impatient little listeners mischievously started the refrain, "There'll be a hot time in the old town to-night," because they knew it was mother's pet aversion, and they thought she certainly would not stand it long.

When at last mother threw open the door and brought out the result of her efforts, shouts of delight greeted Flip. He was dragged off to mother's room to see himself in the mirror. It was indeed a transformation. The matted, red hair had been washed and combed until it hung in a bright, wavy mass around his pale, little face, and his skin was as white as soap and water could make it. The thin face was altogether too white and pinched to please mother, who had hard work to keep from crying over the poor, neglected, little body. The sweater and neat gray suit fitted him well, and he seemed to take infinite pleasure in the



“HE WAS DRAGGED OFF TO MOTHER’S ROOM.”



stockings and shoes which to his mind were a climax of luxury.

After the children had duly admired "Brown Eyes' company" in his transformed condition, and had hugged mother for her share in the performance, they clattered down stairs to supper, at which they were left to themselves, so that no grown up eyes might make the little visitor shy and awkward.

"What are you going to do with Brown Eyes' company?" asked papa as he and mother talked alone together in the room next to the one from which came ripples and shouts of merry child-laughter.

"I can't say yet. He is doing a great deal for me just now in teaching my darlings to love and help others. But I know one thing, I'll see that he does belong to somebody when he leaves here and says good-bye to us. He is a good hearted, brave little chap, and some mother's heart must be found to love and care for him."

The promised story was told after supper and the clock was heard ticking the unwel-

come words, "Bed, time; bed, time; bed, time," and the children hurried away to the soft pillows that waited for the dear, busy little heads. After tucking away her own little lambs, mother went to the room which she had prepared for the little stranger. Flip was standing looking at the bed, still fully dressed, and the little white night shirt that had been laid ready, untouched on the pillow.

"Do you want me to help you undress, dearie?" asked mother.

"No thank you, ma'm, I won't get into that white bed, I guess I'll just lie on this here rug."

"Why, don't you like your bed, Flip?"

"'Tain't that, but you see my cat allers sleeps in my arms, an' I thought as she'd had no bath, p'raps you'd not like her in that bed. I couldn't leave her out, for she's all I've got, and comed to me when no one else cared."

"All right, Flip, let pussy sleep with you by all means; I would not part you for the world. I'm sure she'll like the nice warm bed," and mother reassuringly began to un-

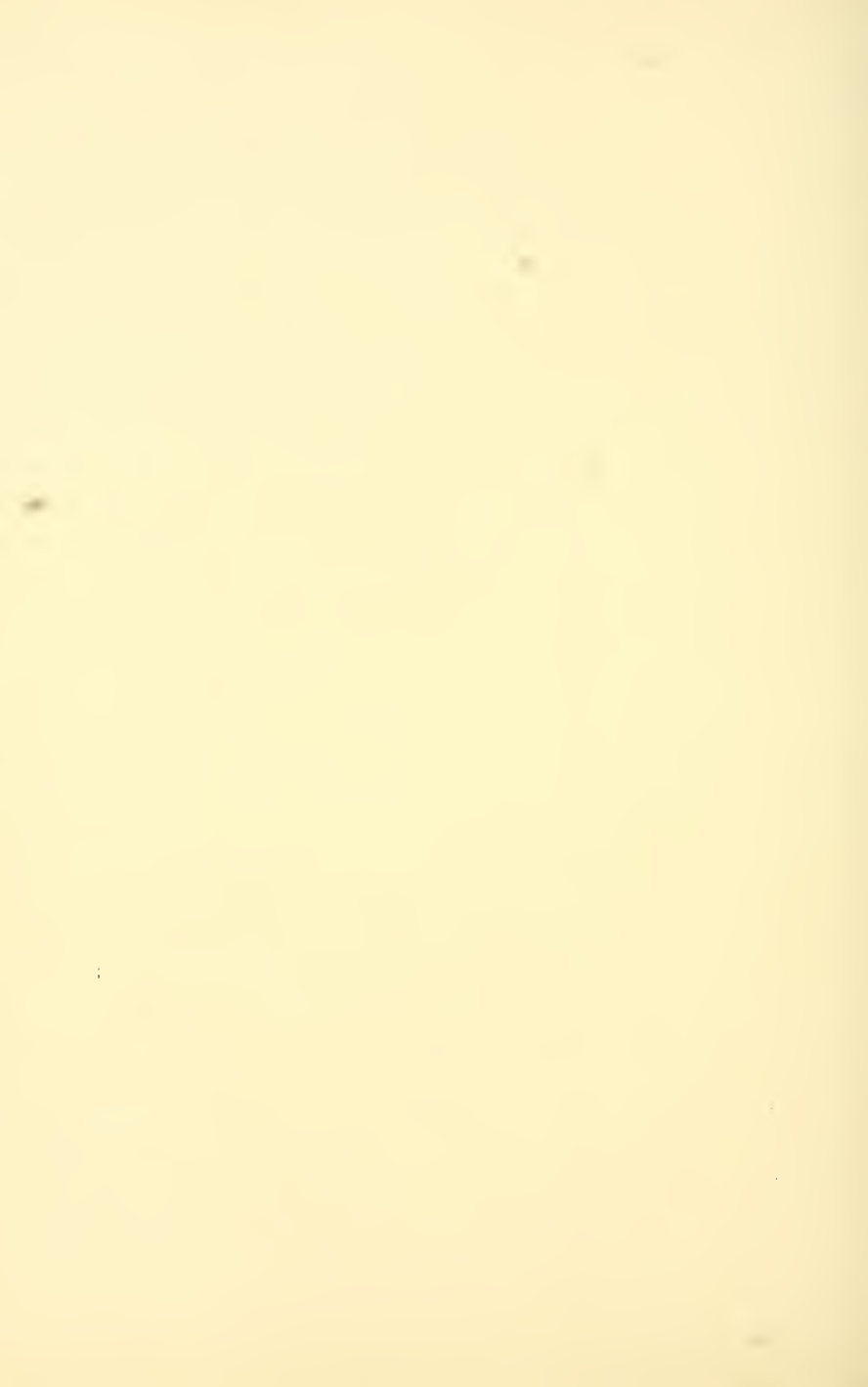
dress the bewildered little one. When all was done, she tucked him up and kneeling by him she said, "Flip, did you ever pray?"

"Yes, mother taught me before she went and died," and solemnly the little voice repeated the simple, strange words :

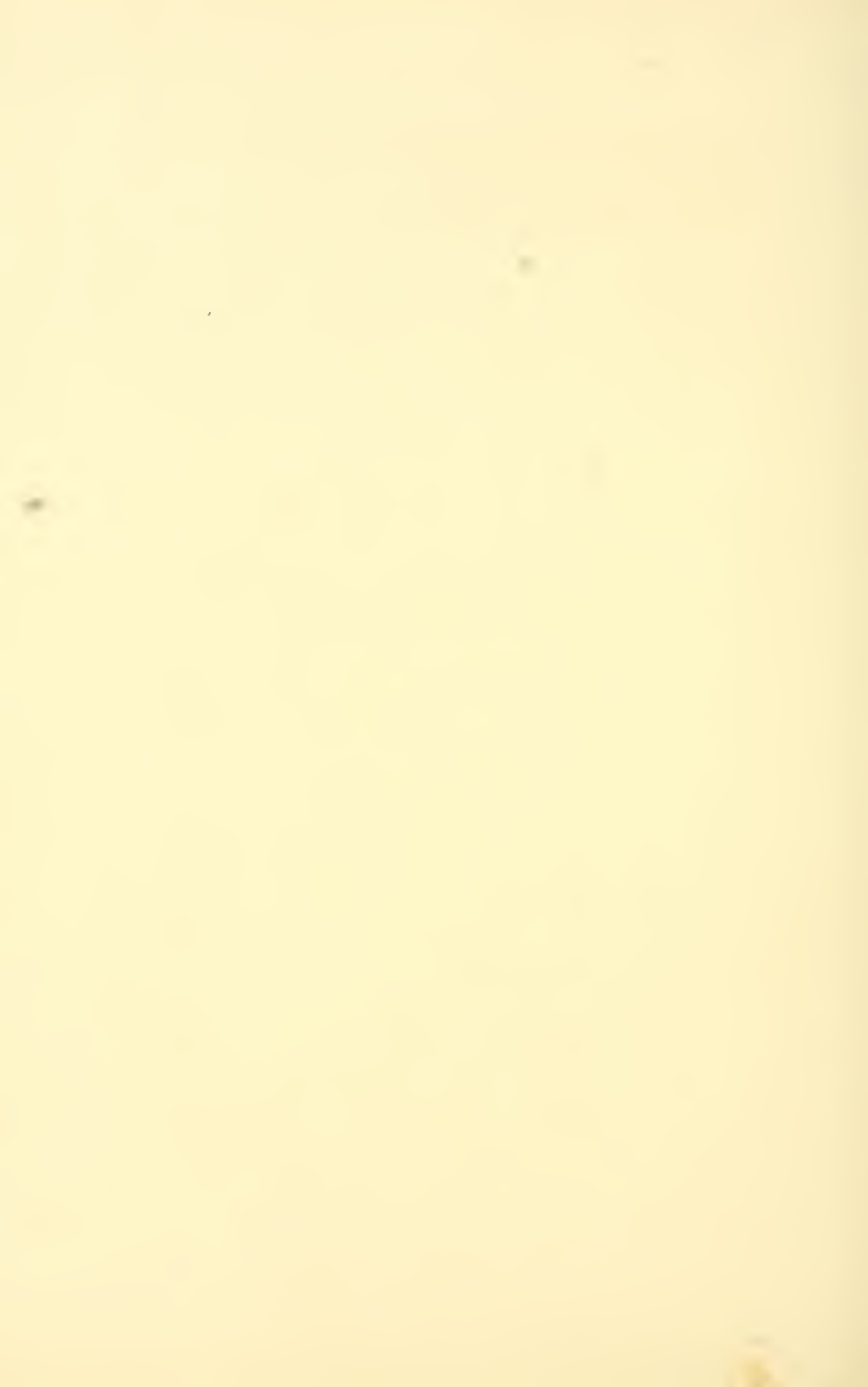
"Good God in heaven, watch over and keep me, let the stars shine on me. Amen."

A silence followed and then mother said :

"Dear Loving God, I thank thee for bringing little Flip for me to love and care for ; help us to show him how much Thou dost love him, and let him never be sad and lonely again." As she smoothed the tumbled hair and kissed the white brow, an unsteady, little voice whispered, "Thank you, that feels like mother ; she did that long, long ago and I have never forgot." Then the tired child drifted to dreamland, and the mother heart wished it were possible to gather in and comfort, and soothe, all the motherless little waifs of the great, cold, weary world.



SUNSHINE.

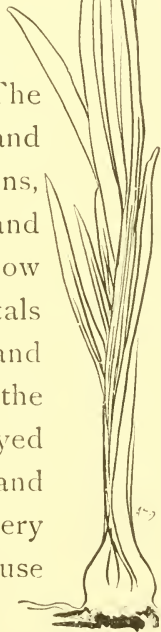




CHAPTER VI.

SUNSHINE.

IT was Spring time again, lovely, gentle, balmy Spring. The brown earth was rich and fertile, and gave forth the odor of gentle rains, and new life that bespoke growth and sweetness to come. The yellow daffodils had pushed their petals through the pale green sheaths and were nodding their heads gaily in the breeze. Cherry trees were arrayed in a bridal splendor of white, and willows hung out a graceful drapery of tender green between the house



and the highroad, against which the sombre old fir tree seemed to stand like a reminder of the Christmas seasons past and to come.

Snowball was having a delightful time practising gymnastic feats in the gnarled branches of the apple tree ; he had missed at least half a dozen sparrows in the last half hour, and had for some minutes been industriously sharpening his claws on the bark in preparation for the prey he hoped soon to catch. Lion and Baby Dimple were romping on the lawn, and the little girl's fair curls caught the sunlight and shone like gold over the pale green of her dress. What a nymph of the woods she was, graceful in every movement, and with a silvery laugh that makes music for the heart as well as for the ear.

Puss stopped his own occupation to watch his dear little mistress. When they were both young, he had romped like that on the lawn, following the ball with ridiculous kitten antics, and often rolling over and over himself with the impetus of a desperate rush, when he was too young to gage his distance. Now he

smiled at the memory of his youth for he was a grown cat, as his splendid size showed well, and he was not jealous at some one else being the playmate of the dear little girl, who was almost first in his pussy-cat affection. Almost the first. Yes! not quite first now, for had he not a lovely, graceful, little gray wife, who had one day come all the way from Kentucky to make her home with him, who had been very shy and homesick at first, but was now devoted to him, having been completely captivated by his aristocratic manner and beautiful tail? He smiled again as he thought of her, shut his yellow eyes that he might better enjoy the vision of the pretty angora, with a pedigree as celebrated as his own, looking wistfully into his face, and telling him with loving, gentle purrs, that she thought him handsomer than any of the cats left in Kentucky.

As Snowball dozed and sentimentalized in the tree, and Baby Dimple raced back and forth on the grass, an earnest, little face appeared at the window of the nursery, be-

hind a veritable barricade of plants. The brown eyes were full of excitement and eagerness, and the dear little face was as sweet and childlike as ever, but the brown curls were gone, and only little ripples on the tossed and tumbled hair remained to speak of their one time existence. There had been great grief on mother's side when scissors had done their work. But years will pass, and boys will grow, and mother's have to watch these changes, so Snowball was not alone in his meditations regarding the effects of time.

Baby Dimple's lips had dropped the many baby words of early days, and for the past year she had been able to shape and voice the torrent of happy chatter with the right syllables and accent, only occasionally putting on some little letter that made mother kiss the sweet red lips, with the words, "She is her mother's baby still," which somehow she never resented, for with mother she always liked to hold that sacred place.

"Baby Dimple, come in quick, I've got something to tell you," shouted a voice

pitched loud enough to be heard several blocks away. "Oh, do come, it's about our flowers, mother is going to pack them to-day." This news caused a sudden change in the programme. Lion was left to his own resources, while Snowball, not willing to be barred out of the excitement, cleared the space between the apple tree and the nursery window at a bound, and peered over the many plants at the dancing little figures beyond.

Their memorable visit to the hospital and the coming of Flip had brought new interests into the children's lives. When "Brown Eyes' company" departed with his black kitten to a happy farm home, where a good, motherly soul made a new world to him, there remained behind a longing in two little hearts to share their joys and blessings with others less fortunate. Mother let them talk out their own little plans, and tried to guide them into useful channels, without spoiling the pleasure they felt in being the first to think of them. Many happy hours had been spent

in the making of scrap books for the children's ward, and sometimes little sacrifices very precious to mother's heart, were made for the little ones, whom they often went to see, that they might deliver their gifts themselves.

One day mother overheard a conversation between her little girl and nurse. Baby Dimple was dressing her numerous family of dolls and had a miscellaneous collection around her on the floor. She was converting one who had been a big grown up young lady doll into a long clothes baby doll, because it had lost a leg, and the defect would thus be less in evidence.

"Miss Dimple," said nurse, "you had better take that doll to your little hospital children. It has seen its best days, I think."

Baby Dimple looked up and her blue eyes flashed, while an indignant retort leapt to the lips that had in a moment lost their accustomed smile. "'Deed I won't, that wouldn't be at all kind or nice. There are enough broken little children there, and they'd think I wanted to make them 'member that they

weren't like us, and it would make them sad. I'll look after my own sick children at home and take them the well ones," and then from her superior vantage ground of hospital experience, she added loftily, with her old disregard of grammar, "You don't understand nothing about it, nurse." Mother, who had remained unseen, thanked God that the precious little heart she loved was beginning to understand something no lesson book could teach, but that was all the same, one of the supreme lessons of a happy life.

One day Brown Eyes said, "Baby, don't you think the little children who live where Flip used to live would like flowers, real growing flowers in their homes, for they can't have gardens like we can."

Baby Dimple had of course seconded the idea with her usual alacrity. Mother did not dampen their ardor by telling them that the plan had often been thought of before, nor did she propose that they send their plants to any of the flower missions already established. She promised that she herself would seek

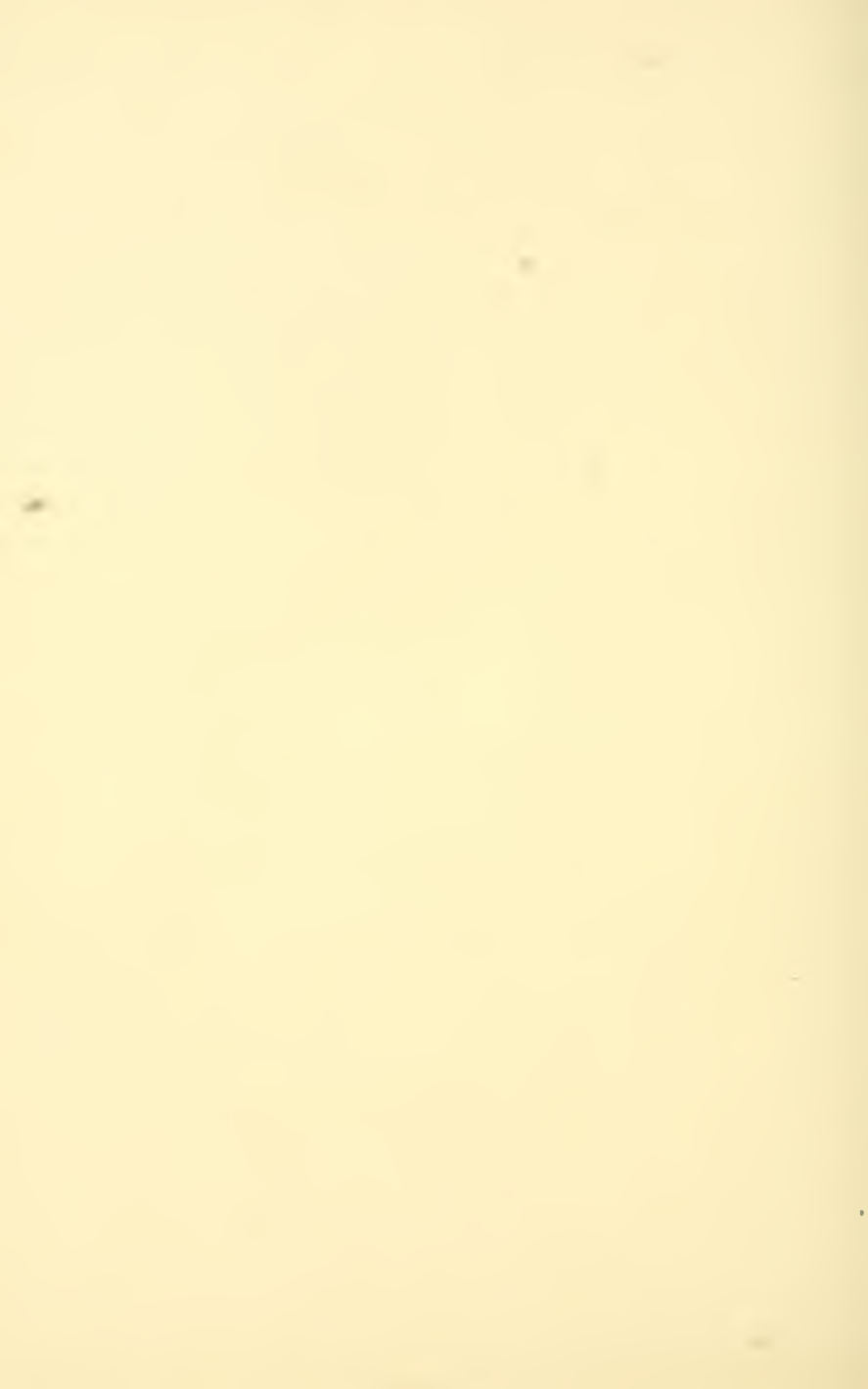
down in those poor, dreary homes, children who should receive their gifts, that the work might grow more personal and interesting to them than it otherwise could. So this was the day that the long cherished, long cared for plants were to be stripped from the nursery window. How carefully the dear, little fingers had picked off the dead leaves, and watered, tended and shielded these precious flowers. Mother had almost feared at first that the plants, like the watched pot that will never boil, would refuse to grow, but after all they did prove a real success. The hyacinths, Chinese lilies, tulips and jonquils were in fragrant bloom, while the geraniums and fuchsias were strong and well grown enough to promise well when their flowering time should come.

Baby Dimple's favorite was a rose bush in a large sized pot. She loved every leaf of it, and delighted in the tender little sprays that would ere long unfold into buds, which in due time would be sweet, little red roses. When the packing had been accomplished, and the



A Farnsworth-Pre W

"PACKING THE FLOWERS."



expressman had been cautioned to use all care in handling the children's treasures, mother sat at the empty window and talked long with her darlings of the coming summer, and the weary little eyes that through the hot months would have something green and pretty to look at.

"I hope my dear, dear rose will get lots of water, and that they will love it, mother," said the little voice that had just the suspicion of a quiver in it. "I would like to have seen it all covered with little red roses, they will look like the faces of the rose-tree's children, won't they?"

"My pet, when mother gives the plants away she is going to give your rose bush to a little girl who has a very sad story, and whose name, also, is Rose, and who has never been well and happy like other children."

"Tell us all about her, mother dear," shouted the story loving little ones.

"Well, darlings, I don't know much, except that she lives in a big tenement in a very narrow street, and that she has never walked,

because her back was hurt when she was a little baby. She has to be alone in a poor, little room where she lives, while her mother is out working, and it is a very lonely life."

"What does the papa do?" asked Baby Dimple.

"The papa went away to sea when she was a wee baby. The sea is a stormy, dangerous place and some months afterward the mother heard that the ship had been wrecked, and almost all on board were drowned, and when he did not come home, she knew her baby's papa was among those lost."

"I don't like that story, it's sad; the baby's papa shouldn't die," said Baby Dimple indignantly, while Brown Eyes expostulated: "Mother can't help it, Baby, he has to die because it's true. Mother isn't making it up in her head."

"I don't care," said the tearful, little voice, "it's not nice, it makes me sad."

So mother changed the subject, and reminded the children of the surprise she had promised they should know all about this

afternoon. A surprise! What a world of mystery and excitement that word contains. They had guessed and guessed and had come no nearer the truth than when mother told them three days before that something lovely was to be shown them very soon, if they would promise to be very quiet and gentle, when the wonderful secret was revealed.

"I know," said Brown Eyes, "the surprise is in the laundry, because the door has been locked and I can't even peep in at the window. Mother has put a curtain up so we can't see in."

"I know, I know," said Baby Dimple with conviction, "that it's not a thing but things, because mother said yesterday when I was teasing to know what it was, 'Be patient and you shall see *them* to-morrow.'"

"They are not anything to eat or they'd be in the pantry, and it can't be babies, because when you came you had a lovely, little blue basket to sleep in, and mother had you in her room, and lay close beside you all the time. She wouldn't have left you in the laundry,

though papa did call you a 'surprise' when he told me that he had something to show me that I would like very much."

Baby Dimple was going to offer her suggestion as to what "they" might be, when mother appeared in the garden with the laundry key in her hand, and two joyous children darted before her to the chamber of mystery.

"Now, steady, children, no noises, remember you promised to be very quiet," said mother as she opened the door, and they stepped into the room and looked around in surprise at seeing nothing.

"Where is it? where are they?" whispered the children.

"Listen, and then hunt," said mother smiling.

Quiet reigned for a moment, and then a gentle, contented little "mew" sounded from the cupboard in the corner of the room.

"Mother, that's Blurette's voice," said Brown Eyes, and on tiptoe the children followed the sound and carefully opened the cupboard door. Then all mother's warnings

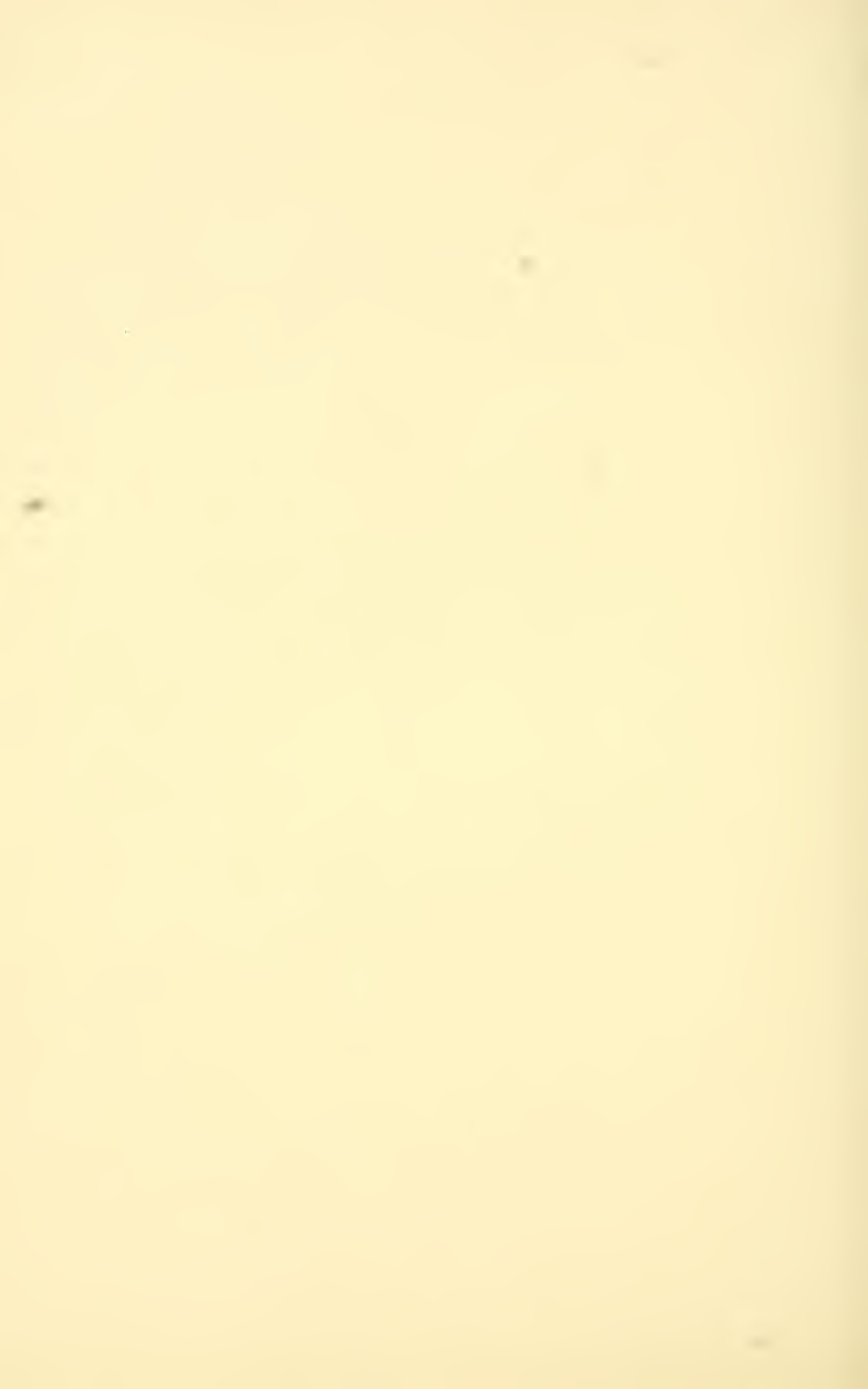
and the promises were forgotten, and screams of delight made her fear for poor Bluette's nerves as the children threw themselves on the floor, and covered the lovely gray pussy with kisses, for there by her side, shielded tenderly by her gentle, white-tipped paws, were three of the sweetest, fluffiest wee kittens. One was pure white, one a delicate gray like the dear little mother, and the other a mixture of colors. Their little mouths that opened very wide were of the pinkest of pink as were the little paws that stretched in such a baby-like fashion, while their ridiculous little square heads wobbled around helplessly, with the eyes still shut tight.

How happy Bluette was to show off her darlings! She purred and purred and then gave cunning little "mews" in a low motherly tone, to which the kittens would answer with cries that were far from musical. Then she would lick and lick them with a fervor that seemed to say, "My kittens shall be an example of cleanliness and neatness, however hard I have to work." The laundry door had

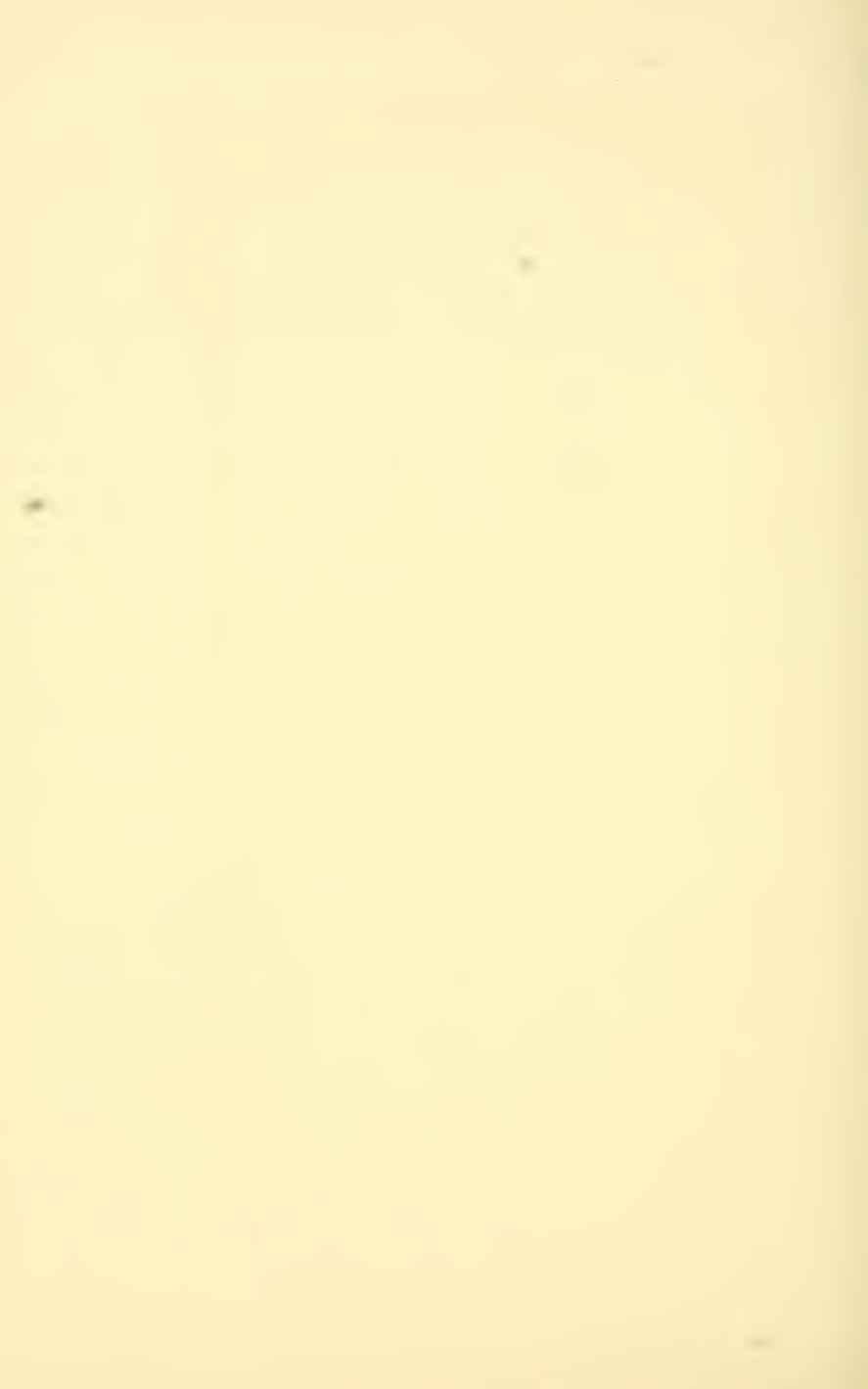
been left open, and unheeded amid the children's delighted exclamations, some soft, gentle feet crossed the floor behind them. Snowball had missed Bluette and had hunted for her everywhere. She had been carefully shut up for fear he might not like her giving so much time to her babies. Now he had found the place and gliding past Baby Dimple, he stood gazing on the wonderful "surprise." It seemed to bewilder and puzzle him. Mother's first impulse was to catch Snowball and bear him away, but on second thought she decided to wait developments and hushing the children watched the scene.

Bluette lovingly stretched out her neck and said "mew." Snowball answered and drawing nearer gently licked her face and ears. Bluette turned to the kittens and purring loudly licked them. Snowball hesitated, and then as if yielding to the inevitable stretched himself out beside her and actually began energetically to wash the furthest off kitten that she could not reach. No wonder the children were late for dinner; no wonder it was

hard to carry Snowball and Baby Dimple away from the charming family. But there was some real consolation in saving nice little bits of meat and other good things to be later bestowed on the dear little mother, whose family bid fair to become a general centre of attraction for many a day.



STARLIGHT.





CHAPTER VII.

STARLIGHT.

IT had been one of the hottest days of a hot summer, and the brazen sun had scorched and glared pitilessly down on the crowded tenement district, and the sidewalks and roofs sent back heat intensified. The sickening odors, always pervading the alleys and houses of that quarter, made the air heavy. Sick and weary ones, weakened from lack of food and a long spell of oppressive heat, suffered, struggled, and in many a garret and cellar died. Summer with its shady trees, its



fruits and flowers, its glowing sunsets, and balmy nights full of insect minstrelsy, that makes the hill and forest regions deliciously drowsy and restful, is felt and seen in totally different guise in the treeless, flowerless, overcrowded slums. While the cooling waves of the great Atlantic roll in at the summer resorts bearing with them at dawn and eve, a refreshing breath of life-giving breeze, the waves of death's cold, relentless waters are the only ones that bring change and relief with the rising and setting sun, to the feeble, aged and still feebler babes of the "other half" when this weather reigns long over the city.

In a small room, six stories from the narrow street below, a little girl lay watching the patch of sky that could be seen behind the battlements of the great bridge tower. She lay on two chairs with a pillow behind her, her little white hands moving nervously, while the big, sad blue eyes had within them a far-away dreamy hunger for things beyond their reach. The room was very bare, certainly the home of those who could afford

only the barest necessities of existence. But it was clean and neat, and if compared to the neighboring rooms that swarmed with men, women and children, who cared little for the use of soap and water, it was a perfect oasis of sweetness in a desert of squalor.

Rose sighed. It was not a sigh of impatience, but rather of utter weariness, and then her eyes brightened, for a sight she loved gleamed out above her. The setting sun flung up its departing glories into her special little patch of sky, catching some fleecy white clouds, and making them shine as burnished gold against the pearl and opal background. How the sick child loved that glory of light. She oftentimes saw castles with wonderful walls and gates, at others, a sea of gold-tipped ripples, and yet again, mountains with wonderful rosy peaks. Every change of color she watched breathlessly, until the pageant was over, and a pale green sea of ether was left behind to catch and hold the darkening shadows of night.

Then she sighed again, and turning pain-

fully looked toward the windowsill at her side. "Dear, dear flowers, how I love you," she whispered, stretching out her hand and touching the petals of some of the wee red roses that peeped out amid the green leaves of the sturdy bush. "You are so sweet and



friendly, like so many little faces and each face smiles at me," and the sad look vanished as she counted carefully the many little buds that were yet to bloom.

Mother generally came home soon after the sun had gone, but to-day she was late and

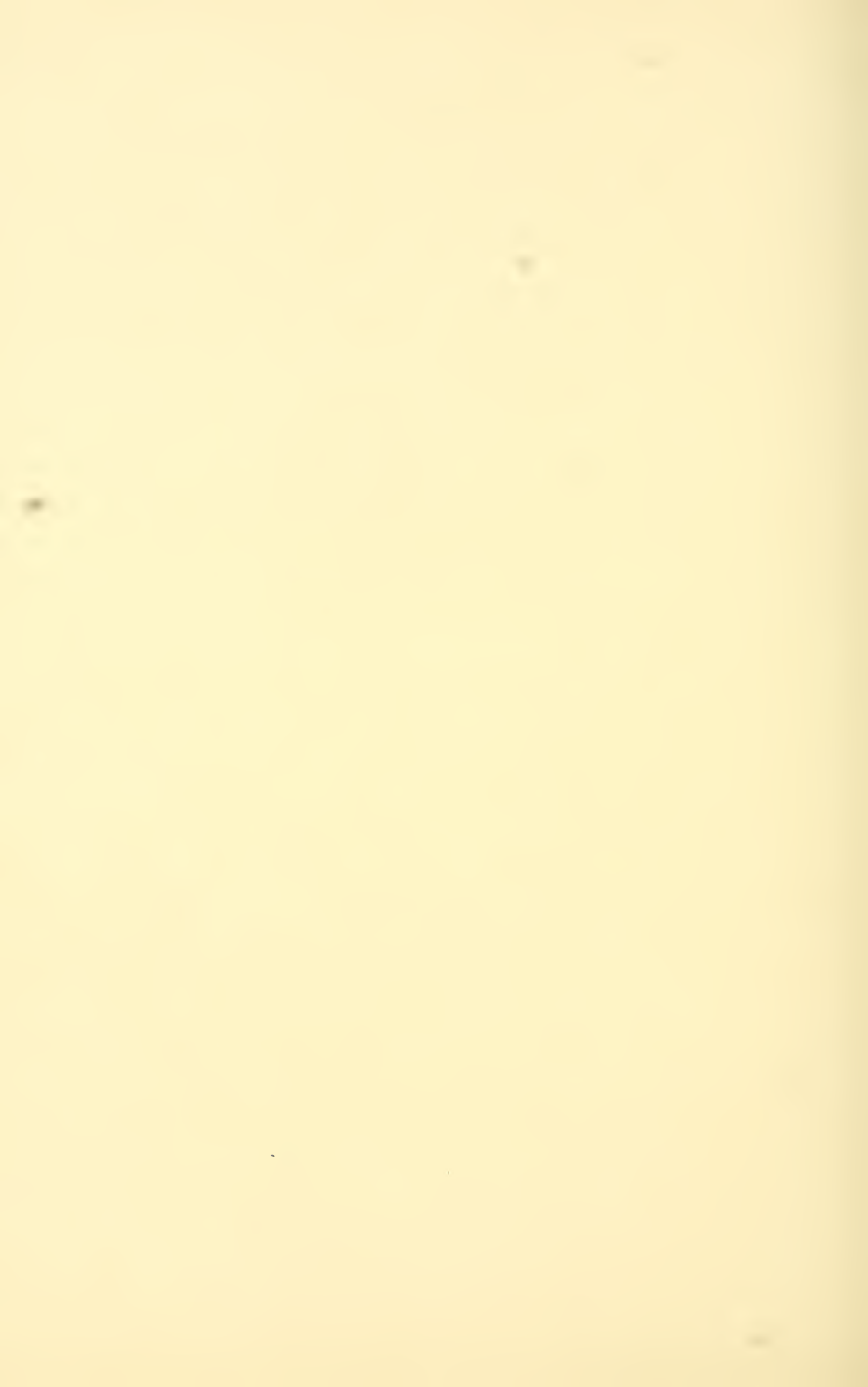
time seemed to pass slowly, while shadows gathered quickly in the corners of the room and crept out toward the child, who in her little white gown held the light longer than anything in the room. A faint breeze stirred at the window. The little one drew a deep breath of relief as it reached out to her. It passed over the roses and carried with it their fragrance. Her ears were straining for the sound of footsteps which she knew she would easily recognize amid the stumbling, hurrying or pattering feet that passed ceaselessly up and down the stairs. The noise of the street surged up from below, and yet the loneliness of the room seemed to wrap her in silence. Once more her eyes sought the patch of sky, and there in the green-blue field gleamed a bright star, scintillating like a jewel, and bringing a sense of comforting companionship to the lonely little heart, while watching it, and thinking how good it would be to have strong wings instead of weary, little, useless limbs, so that she could fly up and up and up in that free space. The weary

eyelids drooped and sleep wrapped her round with the gathering shadows, and for awhile the child of the slums was able to roam through sweet worlds of beauty and peace.

Yes, that was little Rose. Meg, Jane or Molly might seem more appropriate names for a little one whose eyes had opened on so miserable an outlook, for home, to her, had always meant this one small room, bare of carpet, pictures or adornments: but people, even the poorest, do not choose their baby's names to suit the shadows that have gathered round them, but rather forgetting the sad present, and possibly sadder future, they awake in their memory the sweet echoes of the past, and take from them one happy note to last, at least, in name amid the jar of life. So when this tiny scrap of humanity was first put into her mother's arms, and the wee, little face lay close to her wan, sunken cheek, that mother shut her eyes and saw once more the sweet country home which she had loved in childhood: she saw flowers she loved: the sky unsoiled by smoke, and the green fields



"KISSED THE WHITE BROW."



for which her eyes hungered in this desert of bricks and mortar, this place where human beings were piled together like so many hopeless, helpless grains of sand. Loathing the present as she loved the past she said, "I'll call my baby Rose."

"Sure and her life'll have plenty of thorns in it," laughed the old Irish woman, who was her rough but kindly nurse. The saying had proved true, for life had gone hard with little Rose. Not only had her six years been spent in the misery of slumdom, with its bitter winters and its stifling summers, but she was a cripple, and to her the fun and frolic of the children of the street was debarred. Still little Rose had some joy, some sweetness in life, but the sun and centre of it all to her was mother. If mother could only have stayed at home always, the wistful little face would never have been sad, and those big eyes would have had more laughter and brightness than tears to dim them. But she could not wish mother to stay at home with her, because when she had to do it, it meant

that work was scarce, and that both had to go hungry, and mother would cry a good deal.

Rose remembered once how sad and silent mother was all the time she was putting her to bed, and how she crept out when she thought her little girl was asleep and the next morning, when Rose kissed the dear, thin, hard worked hand, the ring she loved to play with was gone. Mother never spoke about the ring after that, and her little girl knew she was sad about it, for it was the ring papa gave her long ago. No, it was better that mother should work, and she had got quite used to waiting for her return, and to her, this was always a bright and happy hour of the day, though it was often nightfall, and their lamp gave but a poor and smoky light.

This night, however, mother was later than usual, and the tired child slept so heavily, that the opening of the door, and the lighting of the lamp did not rouse her. Their scanty supper was ready before her mother gently kissed the white brow into consciousness of life again.

“My Rose-bud, were you tired of waiting for mother? She *has* been an awful long time to-night,” she said, after the child had welcomed her with a joyful awakening cry.

“Ain’t you very late, mother? It did seem an awful time,” and after a searching look into the sad, tired face, she said, “You’ve been crying, mother, what’s up?”

“Never mind, now, dearie, I’ll tell you after supper.”

So after the meal was over, the two who were all in all to each other sat close to the little window, the tired child resting in mother’s arms, and the weary mother comforted by the knowledge that these clinging arms were still about her neck.

“You’ll have to know, so I’d better tell you now. I’ve lost my work, and we’re behind in rent. The landlord wants our room, so you and I will have no home, Rose, my pet.”

“No home,” gasped the child frightened; “no home?” and the little one who could neither stand nor walk, thought with helpless horror of the cruel, busy, crowded street,

that sounded to her from her far above window like the roar of an angry torrent, ready to catch and whirl her away to danger and death.

"Poor, little lamb," whispered her mother, "it is for you I care. If only I could get money enough to go far away from this big, cruel city, you should lie in the fields in the lovely country, which I used to love."

"The fields, all full of white flowers and gold ones, like the light after the sunset has gone? Oh, mother, do go there. Can't we?"

But only helpless tears, falling thick and fast on the child's head, answered the eager plea. What a hungry longing there was in her heart for that same, dear home spot, but what a despair at her helplessness: and then through her tears she caught sight of a bright, smiling, hopeful star, and with a glad thrill her heart said, "God can help us." Bravely she wiped the tears away, and comforted the little one as she put her to bed with cheery words, and they were almost happy, when they fell asleep, perhaps for the last time in the room that had been home to them so long.

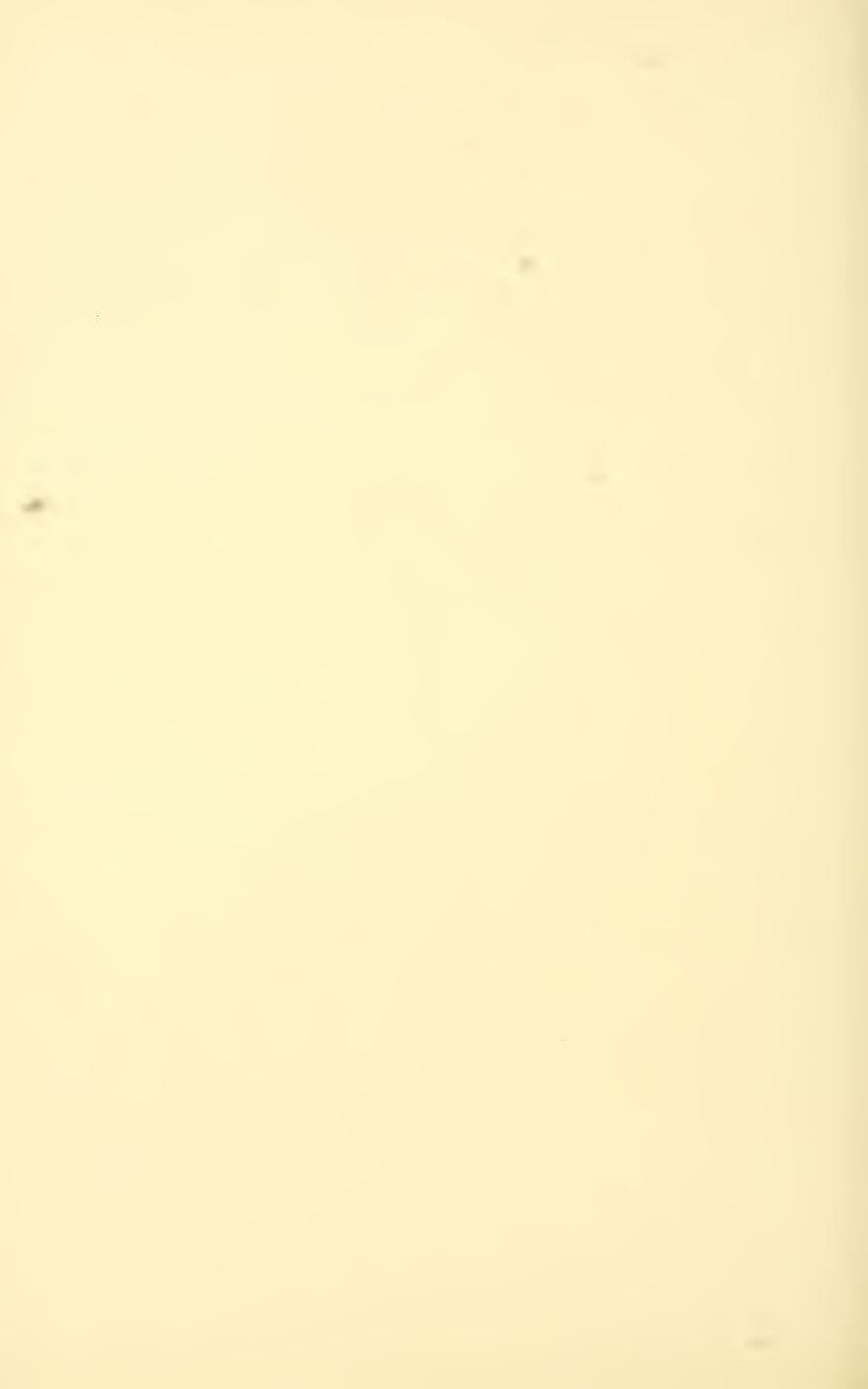
Baby Dimple had not been well that day, the heat, even in the shady garden, was almost past endurance. When evening came, she was feverish, and cried over a headache that made her eyes heavy and robbed life for the time being of all its fun and enjoyment.

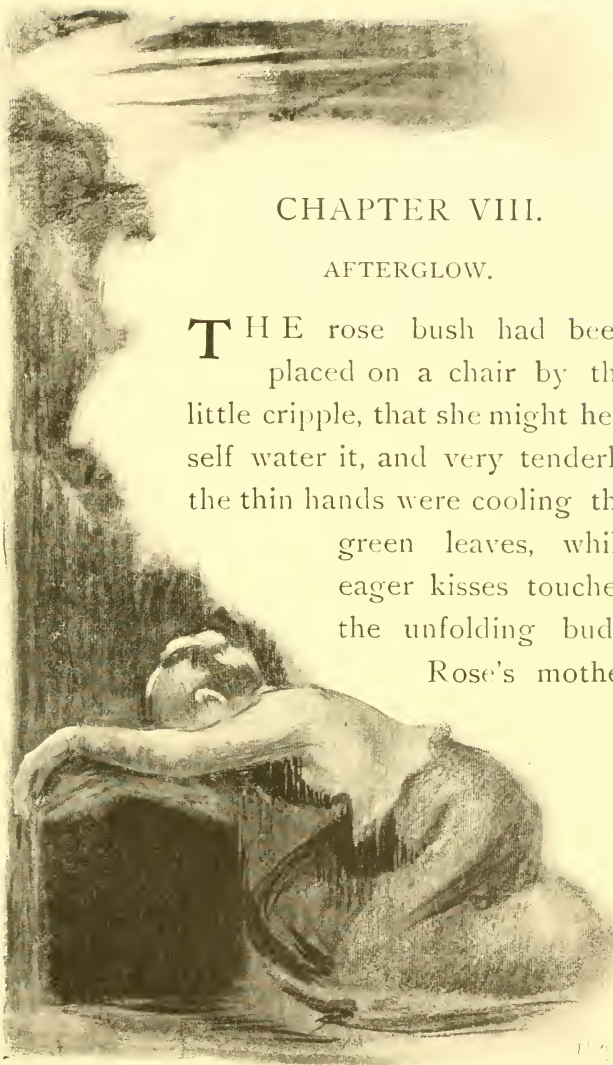
Mother found her sobbing in the midst of her family of dolls, which she had not energy to undress for the night. The big rocking chair that had been in the nursery since she was a long-clothes baby was drawn up to the window, and the little hot head was comforted and soothed, while mother rocked her and played she was a little, wee baby again.

Stories! No she didn't want stories, mother must sing; so mother sang and sang, while outside the night breeze swept through the willows, and the crickets shouted and drummed in rivalry to the bull-frog that raised his voice sonorously in praise of the summer night. Baby Dimple slept. Mother's eyes were watching a star so bright and clear in the green-blue sky, that it seemed to be flashing some special message to her.

“Yes, little star, I am very, very thankful,” she said, “that my darlings have been spared to me, and that they have been kept from suffering much in this dreadful heat,” and then she sighed, for she thought of the other scenes that bright ray of light must shine down upon. She seemed to see weary mothers watching by dying babies, trying to fan a breath of air to their gasping lips, and her heart contracted as she pressed her cheek on her little one's curly head. Then came the thought of the little thin face she had seen in the early Spring in a poor tenement room, and she wondered how Rose was standing the heat, and whether Baby Dimple's bush had burst into blossom. Perhaps she had read the star's message aright, and now the star was forgotten, for with Baby Dimple's mother, to think was to plan, and with the dawning of another day, it would also mean to act. Perhaps the coming help made the dream of that weary mother with tear-stained cheek, less dark and dreary as the night passed on and dawn drew near.

AFTERGLOW





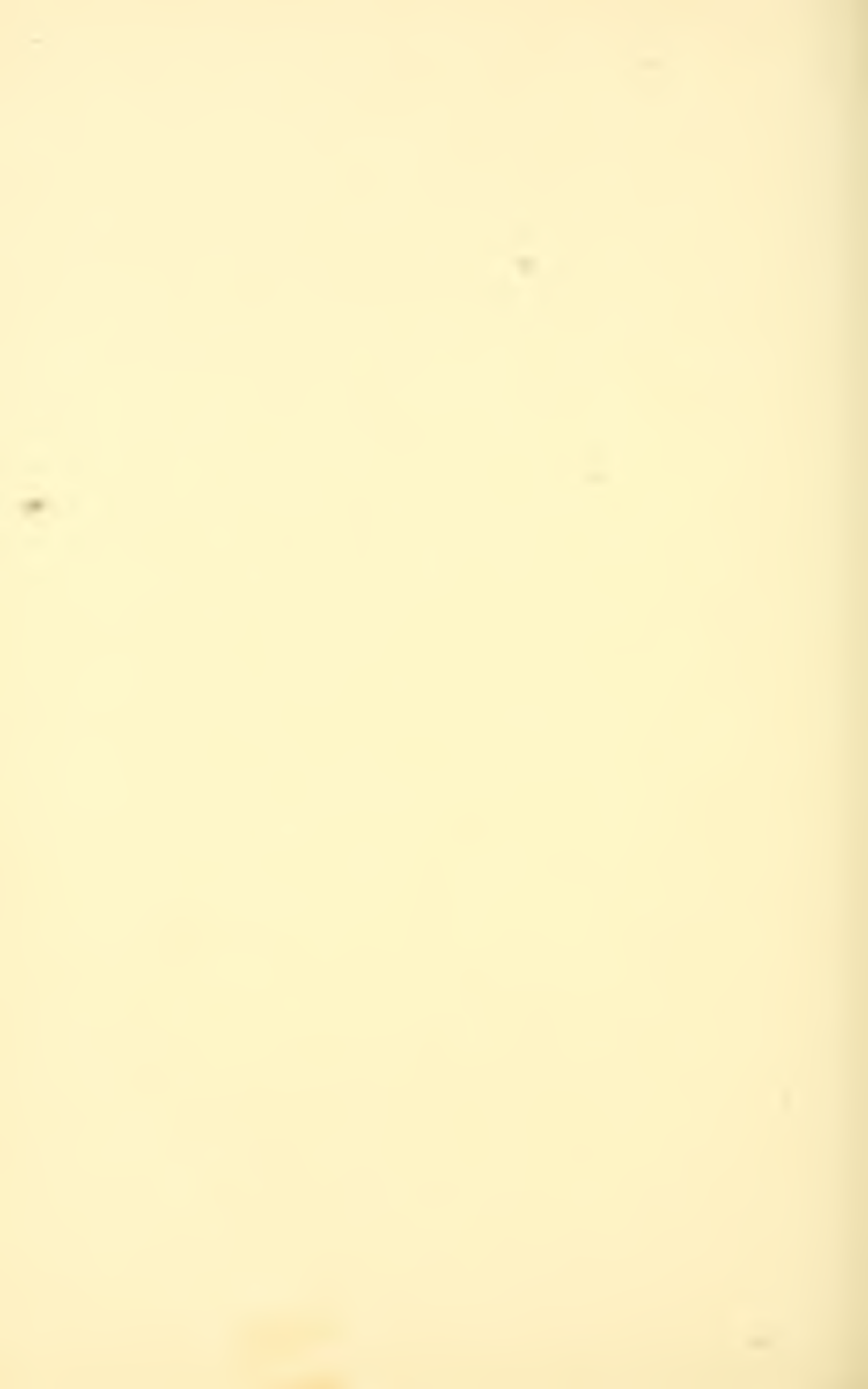
CHAPTER VIII.

AFTERGLOW.

TH E rose bush had been placed on a chair by the little cripple, that she might herself water it, and very tenderly the thin hands were cooling the green leaves, while eager kisses touched the unfolding buds.
Rose's mother

was sadly gathering together their few possessions and listening every minute for the authoritative rap on the door, that would oblige her to let in the man, whose duty it would be to turn her and her child out on the streets. She was a brave little mother, and though weary and burdened with many years of cruel overstrain at work quite beyond her strength, she had not the dejected look of one who gives up the struggle when failure faces her.

This morning, sad as she was, a certain hopefulness brightened her eyes, for had not the star's message reminded her of the One who does care for the fatherless and the widow, and could she look at the gentle child's pale face, and believe God would let suffering, starvation and death come to that innocent, little lamb? Footsteps halted at the door. The hearts within seemed to have stopped with them for a moment, and then to beat double quick, while they waited for the rap, rap, rap. It came, but it was neither rough nor imperative, and as the mother fal-



teringly called, "Come in," a cry of surprise broke from Rose and her face lightened with joyous recognition. It was not the dreaded visitor but Baby Dimple's mother who stood on the threshold.

Then came the reaction. The mother who had nerved herself to bravely face trouble, broke down before friendly eyes and laying her head on the little bundle she had been trying to tie up, she sobbed as if her heart would break. Laying her hand on the trembling shoulder, Baby Dimple's mother turned to Rose and asked, "What is it, little one? Tell me all."

"Mother lost her work. We have to leave our home because we can't pay rent, and she is sad and troubled for me," said the child simply: a short story, but what a world of misery it held in its plain sentences.

All must be understood, that something could be done, so the two mothers sat on the bed and talked earnestly together. "Let me help you for Rose's sake. You see, I have a little one at home, and she is well and strong,

and I want to help your little girl, because I know how your heart must ache over her pain and weariness."

Just then the delayed knock came on the door panel and the man stepped briskly in who had the power to make them homeless. As his eyes fell on the lady who faced him, his manner changed and he removed his hat, which he otherwise would have kept on his head, as a sign that he had every right to do as he pleased here.

"We shall need these rooms until eight to-night," said Baby Dimple's mother calmly. "Kindly let me know how much we owe you now, as I may not be here when my friends leave."

The man hesitated and then coloring drew out his note book. He wanted to say, "They must get out right now," but he dared not while those authoritative eyes were on his face. So he reckoned the arrears, and giving his receipt for the money, beat a somewhat discomfitted retreat. Little Rose, who had not heard the whispered consultation, asked eag-

erly, "Mother, do tell me, are we going away? Why can't we stay if the lady has paid the money?"

Then Baby Dimple's mother came and knelt by the cripple and said, "Rose, you know when mother was little, she lived far away in a lovely place called the country, with flowers, and birds, and sunshine, that does not burn like it does in the city."

"Yes," said the child with her eyes brightening eagerly, "I know, and when I shut my eyes, I seem to see it all because mother has told me about it so often."

"Well, little one, how would you like to go there, and live always in the same dear little house, with the roses and the honeysuckles climbing up around the windows?"

"Can we, can we?" cried the child, turning wondering, almost startled eyes to her mother, but she could not answer, for her lips trembled, and big tears coursed slowly down her cheeks.

To her, the thought of home and the dear old mother she had not seen in ten, long

weary years, was almost more than her heart could bear.

"I think you can," said Baby Dimple's mother. "You see, you have not gone before, because mother had not the money to take you home, and she thought the journey impossible because of your weak little spine."

The child's face fell. "I can't walk and I can't even sit up for long," she sighed.

"I know that," was the answer, "so you are not going by day, but by night when you can have a bed on the train, and I am sure when you get some of the pure country air, you'll get rosy cheeks like my little girl, and perhaps some day, you'll feel almost well."

What a day of bright anticipations it was to the child in whose life there had been so little change. She begged for stories of the wonderful country to which she was going, and laughed and cried with her mother, and felt as if she were moving in a dream that might pass any moment, and prove itself unreality. At last the afternoon waned, and a carriage drove into the crowded, little street,

arousing great interest and comment, for it was not an everyday sight. The gentleman who stepped out pushed his way quickly through the throng of ragged, dirty street waifs and climbed six pairs of stairs. When he returned, he carried tenderly a precious, though all too light, little burden, and Rose's face was pillowed against his strong shoulder, and looked wondering out at the world she had lived above so long. What a wonderful place the depot was, with its brilliant rows of mighty electric lights, its vaulted arches, its wonderful decorations. How weird and snake-like its long heavy trains, that glided out behind the shining, well-groomed engines, hissing out steam, and sending warning whistles echoing through the great space above.

Awed and frightened, Rose clung close to her protector, whose kind face and cheery voice reassured her. Once in the sleeping car her terror was gone. How soft and restful was the cosy bed with its clean linen sheets and ample pillows. It is no wonder

that before the wheels revolved, or the engine had shouted "I'm off!" the weary child had dropped to sleep, and mother alone lay awake through the early hours of night, planning the future that held now in its unknown days such promises of happiness. The clang of the bell and the whir of the wheels, the creaking and vibrating of the swaying car soothed her at last into dreams, and she did not hear the crash of thunder, nor see the brilliant flashes of the storm, that had come at last to break the awful spell of heat, beneath which the city had suffered so long.

It had been a happy evening for Baby Dimple and Brown Eyes. They had had a tea party at which all of the dolls had assisted, and papa had unexpectedly joined them, bringing a fund of high spirits to enliven the occasion. It was such fun to see their big, tall papa sitting on the tiny chair at their little table, and drinking out of a cup not much bigger than a thimble. With what a flourish he lifted that cup, and what tremendous draughts of tea he pretended to drink from it.

He made one break, however, for Baby Dimple discovered him absent-mindedly lifting the little teapot to his lips, and she feared the whole of its contents would vanish before she could rescue it from her thirsty papa. The climax to the entertainment came, when Lion, hunting for his master, pushed open the door and stalked in uninvited. Tables were generally set much higher than this, so he argued that the plate of crackers so temptingly near his nose must be meant for him. Baby Dimple had shielded her face with her little round arms to ward off his undesired, wet kisses, when she heard a contented crunch and looked up in time to see the last cracker swallowed with cool deliberation by their latest guest. Papa and Lion had to take themselves off after that, and then mother came home, and drawing her chair to the window, she gathered her darlings to her and told the story of Rose, and the new, happy life that now lay before her. As they talked, the room grew dark and sleepy time was long passed, but mother could not stop the current

of eager questions that carried her little ones beyond their own life into the needs and sorrows, and hopes, and joys of others.

Outside the night was very still. Not a leaf stirred, and the oppressiveness was intense. All at once Brown Eyes whispered, "Listen, what is that?" and listening they heard a deliberate scratch, scratch, on the screen at the window nearest the apple tree. They hurried to see what it could mean, and there on the sill stood Blurette with a kitten in her mouth. In a moment the screen was raised and in jumped the cat and laid her kitten at mother's feet, and looking up said very earnestly, "Mew, mew," and then ran back again to the window, looking back as much as to say, "Follow me." Now mother could not very well jump out of the window, so catching Blurette she carried her down to the garden, and then let her guide the little party where she would. Straight to the laundry she went, and picking up another kitten gave it over to mother, returning herself for the third.

“ I don’t know what has troubled Bluette, children, but she certainly wants her babies in the house to-night, so we will carry them in,” which was very cheerfully done at once by two loving, little pairs of hands, while the mother puss purred and rubbed herself against her friends as much as to say, “ Thank you so much, I am very much relieved, and want to show you how grateful I am.”

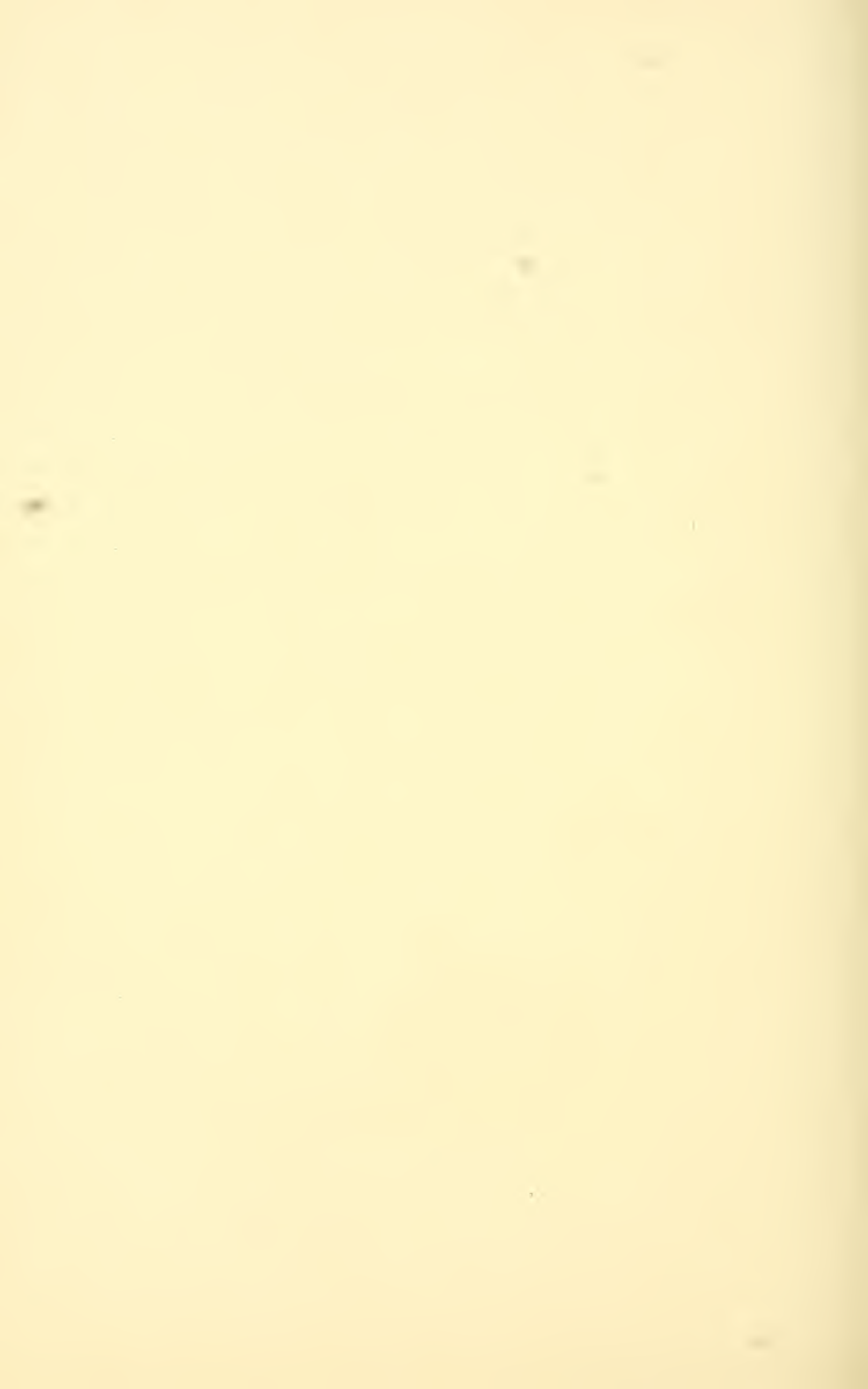
When Baby Dimple and Brown Eyes were fast asleep and Bluette was snugly ensconced in the nursery cupboard with her babies, mother saw the whole room lighted with a lurid flash, and as the house shook with the shock of a mighty thunder-clap, she understood the wise pussy’s action. Smilingly she whispered to papa, “ I think mother-love is the strongest thing in the world.”

“ Yes,” he answered, “ but there is something stronger above.”

And mother added, “ Yes, God’s love, for that is a great big ocean which can never fail, and never grow less, however much we draw from it for ourselves and others.”



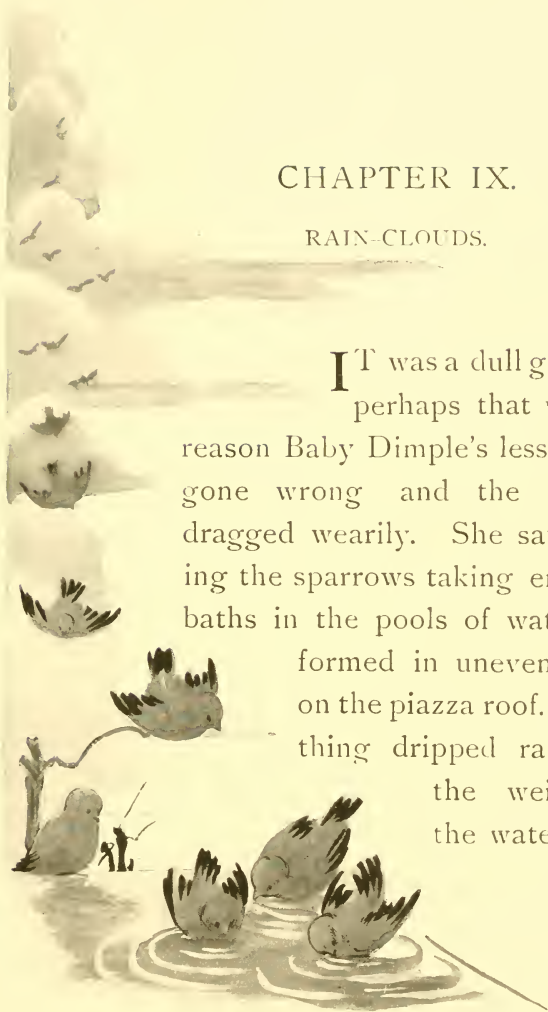
RAIN-CLOUDS.



CHAPTER IX.

RAIN-CLOUDS.

IT was a dull gray day, perhaps that was the reason Baby Dimple's lessons had gone wrong and the hours dragged wearily. She sat watching the sparrows taking energetic baths in the pools of water that formed in uneven places on the piazza roof. Everything dripped rain, and the weight of the water made



the branches and vines, bushes and flowers, hang their heads dejectedly as if woefully out of spirits. Dampness of atmosphere and disconsolateness of spirit often go together, and certainly the sad voice and mournful eyes of our Baby Dimple seemed to bring her into a very close accord with the mood of the elements. The sparrows, on the contrary, seemed to glory in the condition of things. They flapped their wings, jerked their tails, ruffled up their feathers, and hopped in and out of their bath as if they had been surf bathers at a summer resort.

Baby Dimple sighed. It must have been the twentieth sigh that afternoon, and it was echoed by Lion, who had been stretched out at her feet, ever since she had taken up her position at the window, and whose melancholy was really heart-rending, especially when one looked into the great brown eyes that made one feel a sympathy, quite out of proportion to his dog sorrows. At the present moment his grief was caused by no greater misfortune than that which kept his little mistress in doors.

He had set his heart on meeting Brown Eyes at the school door ; she wanted to cut fresh flowers for mother's home coming. They had both been caught at the door on the verge of stepping out into the rain. Nurse had shut them into the nursery with many exclamations about, "Never heard of such a thing," and "Catching one's death of cold."

"I hate rain," said Baby Dimple very emphatically, which showed that her long reverie had not taken her very far from the point. "I just hate it, it is horrid."

"That's very naughty, Miss Dimple," said nurse looking up from her sewing. "Think how glad the poor farmers are over it, and how it makes the corn grow."

"I hate corn, too, you made me eat it at dinner. I don't want the corn to grow," continued the perverse and discontented little maiden.

"Well, think how it makes the flowers grow, then."

"That's no good, for when they are all grow'd you stop me from picking them for my

own mother, when I wanted to make the room look pretty."

"It's no use talking to naughty little girls," said nurse, which was a great mistake, for Baby Dimple was not naughty, she was disappointed, and had not learned the lesson of patience yet, but to nurse all that was not exactly and clearly good, was naughty, because she did not understand, or as Brown Eyes would have summed it up, "Because she was not mother."

Snowball at that point bounded to the window sill by his little mistress and in a moment, his whole attitude as well as the mew to which he gave vent, said plainly, "I like sparrows."

"No," said Baby Dimple, answering that thought, "you can't have them, they are very silly and horrid to like the rain, and very naughty to chase the dear song birds, but I can't let you eat them, it is cruel." So the yellow eyes had to flash disappointed glances through the window pane, while the white paw patted ineffectually, while the impudent little

sparrows went on jumping in and out of their bath shouting, "Catch us if you can, catch us if you can!" because they knew quite well that their enemy was safely behind the glass, and could not resent their taunts which teased him until he became as melancholy as the other two occupants of the nursery.

Splash, splash, clatter, clatter down the street came Brown Eyes, the very embodiment of life and high spirits. I am sorry to relate that he chose all the puddles to splash into and enjoyed immensely the little torrent that raced alongside him down the gutter, for it bore on its muddy surface some improvised boats he had started further up the hill; those that floated down successfully were representatives of the White Squadron, while those that sank were invariably Spaniards, which he occasionally tried to raise to the surface again, to the decided detriment of his already rain-drenched clothes. Nurse who had spied him from the window hurried to meet him, and informed the dripping little figure that he was a very naughty boy. It did not seem

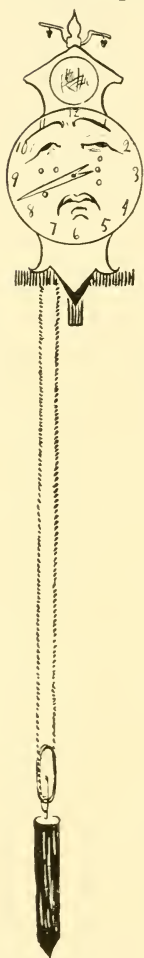
to make much impression on him, however, for with a radiant little face wreathed in smiles he exclaimed in a good imitation of mother's voice, "Boys will be boys."

When Brown Eyes was dry and tidy and could at last enter the nursery he proved the very best tonic to the dismal trio at the window. Lion barked his delight in a sonorous bass; pussy stretched himself as if at last ready to forget sparrow-impudence; Baby Dimple hugged her brother in welcome after pouring out her tribulations. She readily allowed herself to be enticed into playing at "fires" which soon had the nursery in such an uproar with fire engines, hose carts and hook and ladders all coming at a gallop, that nurse retired to the kitchen to lament that "them children will be the death of my poor nerves."

For the time being the gloomy influence of the day seemed dispelled, but it closed in again on both little hearts after supper as they watched in the growing darkness for mother's return, and she did not come. Pat-

ter, patter went the rain on the roof, and every now and then a little gust of wind would send the splash of it against the window, and then moan away among the trees, as if the dampened weather had taken even the wind's high spirits away.

"It's bed time," said nurse, "and I guess it's no use looking longer for your mother. So come along, Miss Dimple." This proved a climax, and Baby Dimple's sad feelings that had been gathering all day long broke into a very real shower of tears. Brown Eyes was made all the sadder as he sat alone at the window watching, watching, by hearing the weeping and wailing that came in gusts from the bath-room, and then from a certain little cot, that seemed to vie with the sad, damp wind in making things dismal. The clock ticked unremittingly, "Mother's not come, not come, not come; Mother's not come," until Brown Eyes, finding it as trying as Snowball sometimes did, deserted the nursery, taking up his watch at the library window. It was nearing his bed time when a tall figure walking wearily turned in at the gate.

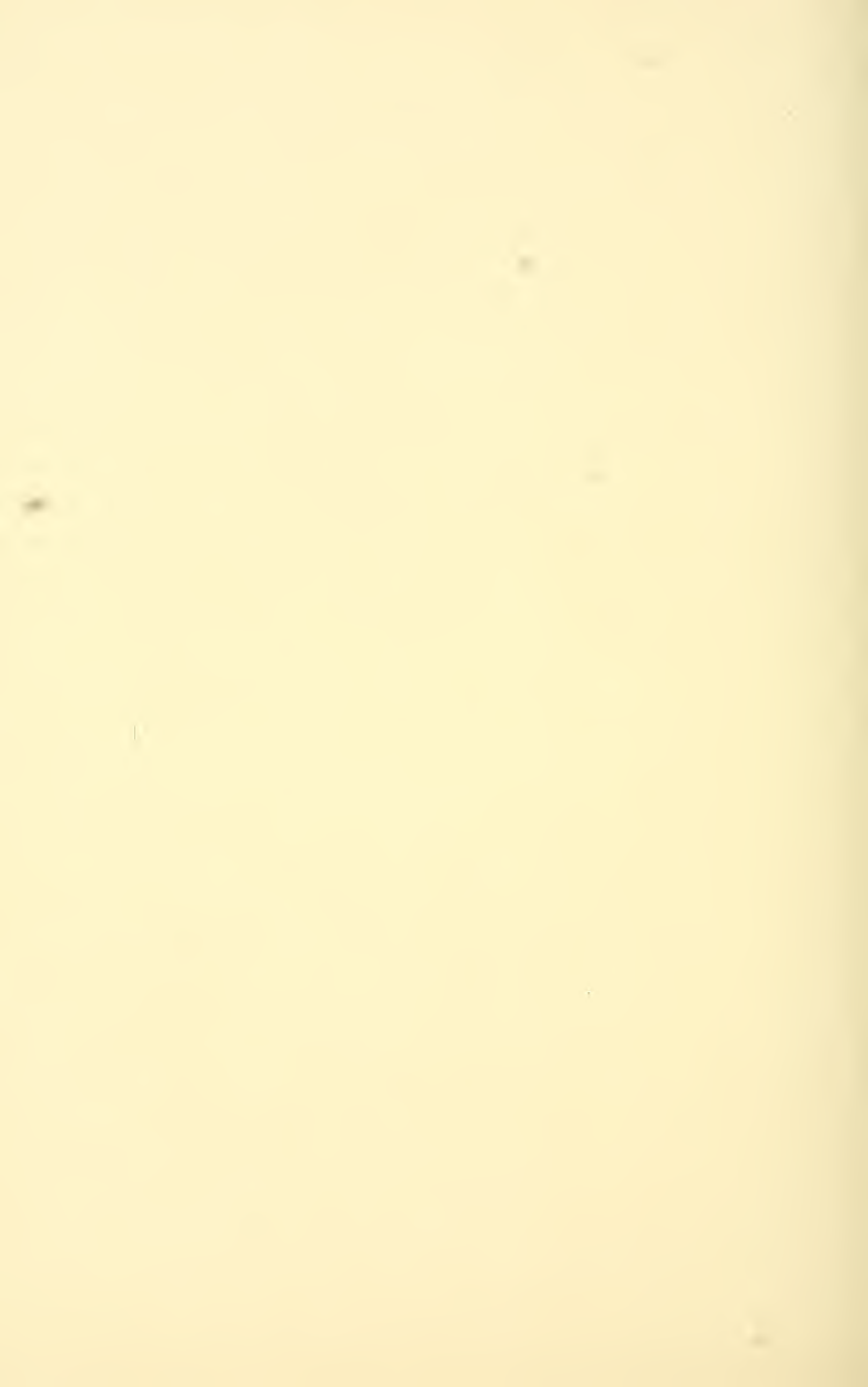


It was papa and papa alone. Where could mother be? The question asked and asked again seemed to fall on deaf ears, for papa entered the library and taking a chair by the fire gazed dejectedly into the blaze seeming to see and hear no one. Lion pushed his cold nose into his master's hand trying to win thereby a caress, and Brown Eyes, taking the little stool, sat down at the opposite side of the hearth, and continued to ask in a troubled, awed, little voice, "Where's mother?"

At last through his own troubled mind, catching the sound of troubled alarm in his little son's voice, papa stretched out his arms to him, and taking the little fellow on his knee said, "Brown Eyes, papa is very sad and anxious." The questions ceased, the pain in the strong man's voice made a big lump rise



"WHERE'S MOTHER?"



in the child's throat. Sorrow, that strange, heart testing angel that shuts out the gleam of joy beams, as the cloud obscures the sun, had entered suddenly the home where his dark shadow had been unknown. Papa's tears fell slowly, wrung from the pain that gathered force as he saw the dreary cloud of sorrow stretching its saddening influence over the future. Brown Eyes who as yet saw and knew nothing but those tears, sobbed quietly in sympathy, and away in a big city hospital, in a quiet little room, mother prayed, while homesick tears fell on the white pillow, "Dear Lord, comfort my darlings and keep them safe for me."

When Brown Eyes cuddled up to his father's side in bed that night, for comfort, and knew that mother was not coming home, and could not come home for a long while, and that they must pray hard for God to spare to them the life to which their lives were so closely bound, Baby Dimple in her little cot at the side knew nothing. One little hand was stretched out through the bars for mother to

hold when she came, while the other pressed close to her heart the one-eyed monkey, who seemed to smile complacently as he showed his glittering bead teeth, and still held the place that Snowball so coveted.

Dear comforting angel of sleep. She kept her soft, warm wings between our two little hearts in their sorrow. For mother the hours dragged wearily as she fought out the battle with her homesick heart, and listened to the little clock at her side that rang out the hours; and for papa with his anxiety, they seemed to be unending with a whole life-time passing before his tired brain.

Papa was asleep at last, and that heavily when the tap, tap, tap on the bars of the cot roused him. "Mother, mother dear," said the little girl's voice, and then the small white figure rose in the bed, and Baby Dimple peered over with blue eyes that were keen even in that indistinct light. A pause followed and then the little voice whispered, "Mother, where's mother? where's my mother?" Papa pretended to be asleep. Baby

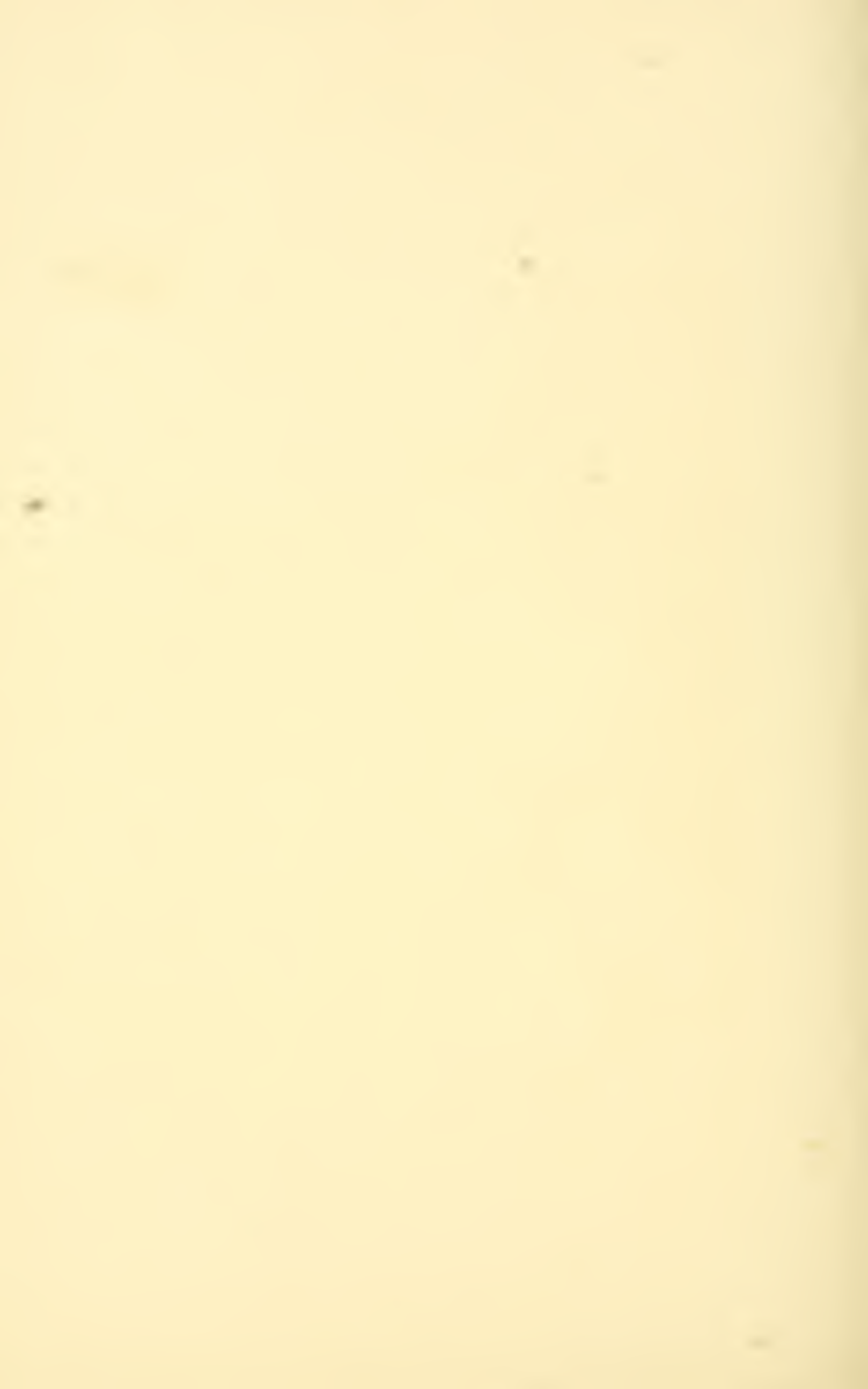
Dimple rose and leaned over and then with an indignant little snort she cried, "That's not my mother, that's Brown Eyes. What's he doing in my mother's place?"

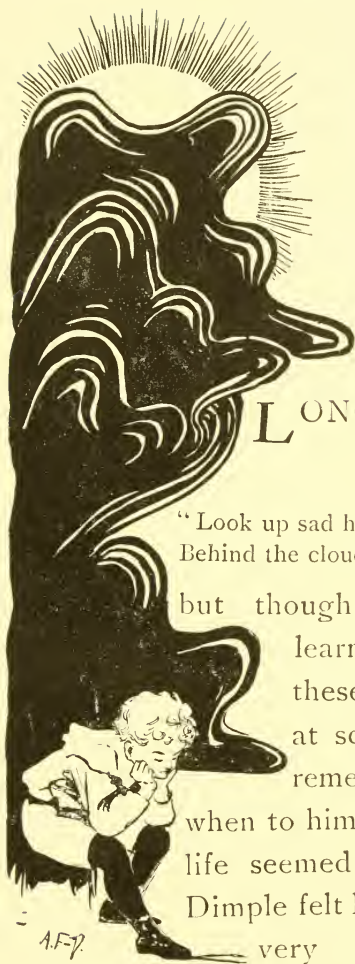
"Hush," said papa, "you'll wake him ; come over to papa and he'll cuddle you," which the little maiden did, but not without sundry little shoves and pushes against her innocent, unoffending brother. When settled in close to papa came the inevitable question, "Where's mother ? I want my mother. Why didn't she come home?" and papa had to tell the truth as gently as he could, about their mother being very sick, and sending her dear love to her baby, and the message that she must be very good while she was away. The dead silence in which the news was received made papa at first think Baby Dimple had not understood, but it was the stillness when the storm clouds gather, the calm while the great wave draws its waters back to dash with fury on the shore. This papa discovered when he asked, "Does my pet understand, and will she send a loving message to dear

mother?" a gasping, long breath was his only answer, and then the grief laden little heart unburdened itself in the agony of tears and sobs, that made papa forget his own sorrow and roused Brown Eyes to a realization of the sad news which dreams had banished for awhile, and set Lion to howling pitifully through the door which was closed against him.



STORM CLOUDS.





CHAPTER X.

STORM CLOUDS.

LONGFELLOW has said :

“Look up sad heart and cease repining,
Behind the cloud is the sun still shining.”

but though Brown Eyes had learned and repeated these words very fluently at school, it was hard to remember them now, when to him the sky of his little life seemed all clouds. Baby Dimple felt her mother's absence very deeply sometimes,

and when the wave of mother-sickness came over her, she would fly to her mother's room, take a certain favorite wrapper from the cupboard, and creep into her little cot with it, covering the gown mother had worn with tears and kisses and finding great consolation thereby. She between times seemed to forget, or anyhow could enjoy playing with her dolls, or listening to papa's stories which were very exciting, and never in the least pathetic. Sleepy time sometimes brought tears again, and heart rending entreaties to be taken to the hospital to her *own* mother, and once or twice papa's heart ached to find the little white pillow wet after his baby had sobbed herself to sleep.

With poor, little Brown Eyes, however, who was older, it was the steady, ever present heartache. For many days no ray of good news reached him, and often papa himself stayed in the city, too anxious to be far from the hospital. Then came a dreadful day that Brown Eyes could never forget. Papa had not come home the night before and

though Brown Eyes had crept from his little bed, and had sat on the stairs to catch him the moment he should enter, that he might hear the news, he had at last been found by nurse fast asleep on the watch, and carried to bed to toss and cry out in uneasy dreams the rest of the night. So Brown Eyes trudged heavy-hearted to school but did not notice the pitying glances of his teachers as he took his seat.

Recess came and as the boys ran out to play, one said to Brown Eyes, "Say, I'm sorry for you. My father read a piece in the paper about your mother. She's dying, ain't she?"

"Dying? My mother dying?" Brown Eyes stood still in bewildered horror.

"Yes, didn't you know? That's what the paper says."

The little white face frightened him, and before he could add sympathy Brown Eyes was gone, dashing away hatless and coatless for home. Down, down, down the hill he ran like a hunted deer, and behind him the wind

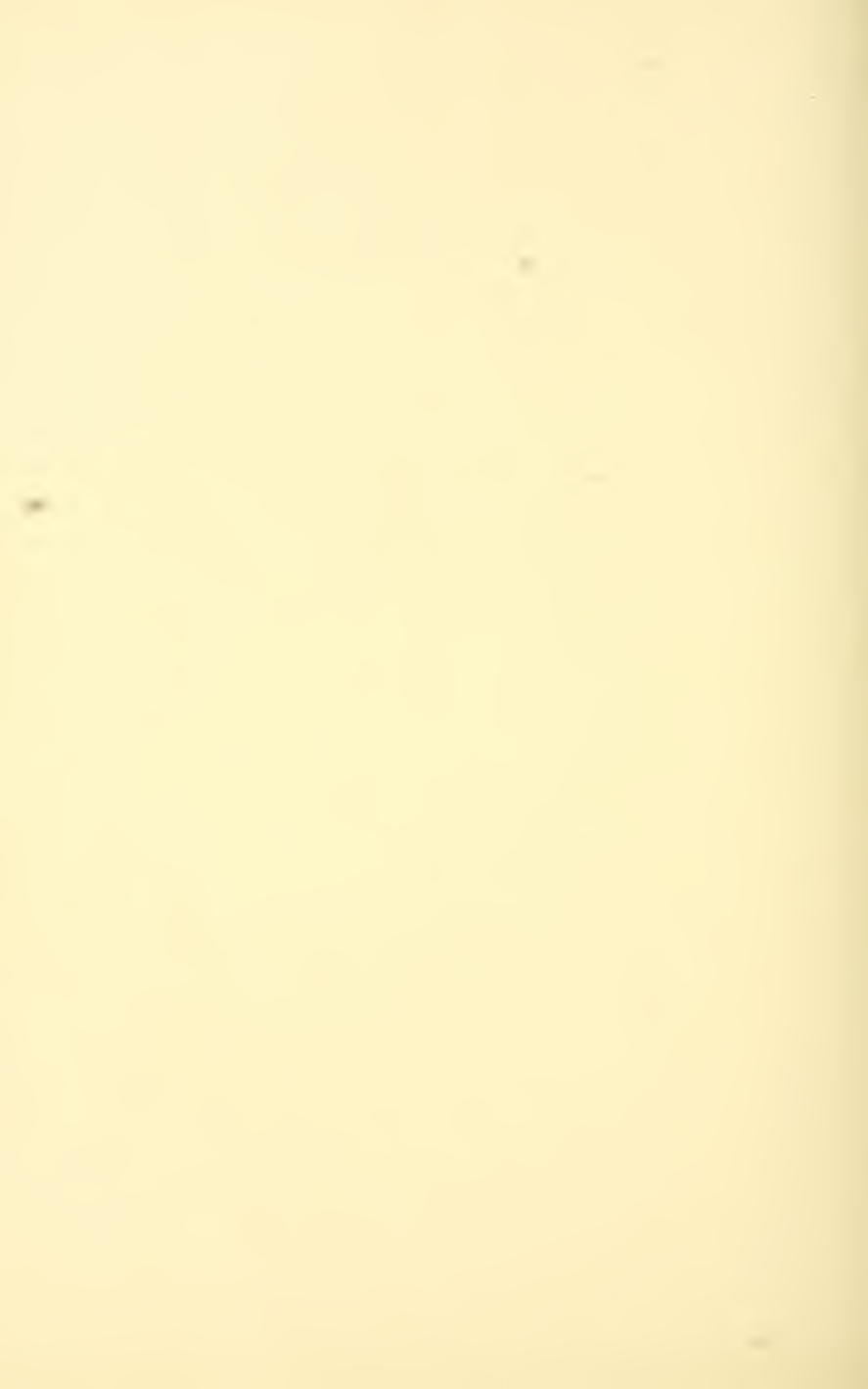
seemed to sing and shout those words, "Dying, dying, your mother's dying, ain't she?"

"Nurse," gasped the frightened, breathless child, "I must go to my mother, I can't stay away; they say she's dying, my mother, my own mother. Do you hear?"

"Hush, child, hush. Your papa would not like you to go. Stay with Miss Dimple. I don't know what to believe, we'll hope for the best, but if it is the worst you'd only be in the way. It's no place for children like you, Master Brown Eyes, so go to the nursery like a good child," and nurse left him. But in his heart he said, "If it is the worst my mother'd want me, I know she would," and he determined if nurse would not help him, he would go alone. On tip-toe he crept to the nursery door, and peeping in saw Baby Dimple blowing soap bubbles and talking merrily to Snowball, who sat with face upturned watching her, and attempting at times to catch the frail, shiny things which sailed so provokingly out of reach. No fear of disturbance from



"SOAP-BUBBLES."



that quarter for another half hour. Baby Dimple would thoroughly amuse herself, and nurse who was ironing was not likely to come upstairs unless called.

Brown Eyes went quickly to his room and seized his best coat and cap and opening his little bank, took out two whole bright quarters, he had with much self-denial saved. A minute more he had quietly shut the front door after him and was racing down the hill to the depot. He had never boarded the cars alone, but he was too utterly absorbed in his mother to think of being afraid, and when the great ponderous engine rolled into the depot with its train of cars, he climbed aboard with a sense of relief,—nurse, his only dread, had not caught him. When at last he reached the great city and saw the whirl of life and traffic, and knew not which car to take, nor which street to turn up, he felt a sinking of the heart, and a great desire came with it to creep away and cry. Then came again to spur him on those cruel words, “Your mother’s dying, ain’t she?” Her face was all he saw now as

he plunged into the crowd and made his way up the street, leading to the heart of the great city.

By and by when his feet grew tired he began to think. This would not do, how did he know he was going in the right direction to the hospital? He stood still and wondered. Which way had mother taken them, it was in a car, but which car? All sorts of cars were passing him in both directions. Ah! he knew what he would do, a bright thought had come to him. In one of papa's stories the little girl had got lost in the city, and she went to the big policeman who was kind to her and took her home. He would find a policeman and ask him the way. That was soon done, but when the brown-eyed little fellow looked up in his face and said, "Please, Mr. Policeman, tell me which way to go to the hospital?" the big man laughed kindly and answered, "Which hospital? There are more than a dozen in this city, my boy."

Poor Brown Eyes, this was a puzzle. To him it was the Hospital. Tears gathered in

his eyes and the lump in his throat threatened to choke him.

“What was it like, little one?” asked the policeman kindly, pitying the child’s distress.

“Oh, it’s very big, and built of red bricks and has lots of steps.”

The policeman shook his head. “There are lots of them like that, try again.”

But the child could not try again. Big tears were now rolling down his cheeks. He had failed! he could not reach his mother now, and with that bitter thought came again those haunting words, “She’s dying, ain’t she?” and following them the other words, “That’s what the paper says.” At the same moment the paper sticking out of the policeman’s pocket caught his eye.

“Mr. Policeman, that’ll tell you,” he cried. “It’s my mother I’m going to,” here his voice broke. “It’s in the paper, they say—they say—but it’s not true, it can’t be—they say she’s dying.”

Touched and wondering the policeman

mechanically unfolded the sheet. It was not a very reliable newspaper, but it had big headlines which were easy to read, and there were also startling pictures. "Dying," yes, there were the words. The picture under it might have been any woman, but Brown Eyes could trace a likeness in attitude to a picture he knew of his mother.

"Quick, quick," he shouted, "that's it; tell me which hospital and how to go."

The policeman was a man of action and his interest was thoroughly aroused by now. So taking the child by the hand, he stepped into the street, and waited an approaching car. "Little chap, that car passes the door. I'll tell the conductor to look out for you. Keep a brave heart and remember that the newspapers lie sometimes."

The car stopped and picked up the little passenger and shot smoothly on again. But, oh, what a weary journey it was to the child. Houses, houses, houses, but none of them familiar, and still no hospital in sight, and always those weary, haunting words until it

seemed to become a race for life, her life, the one without whom all his childhood would be sad and dark. The car stopped with a jerk, the conductor beckoned to Brown Eyes. Yes, there it was, the big red pile of buildings. He was not afraid now because he was near her. He hurried over the intervening sidewalk, up the steps and tried to open the big door, but it was too much for his strength. Another try and it yielded, but not to his little efforts. It opened from within and the child fell forward into a man's arms. Strange and wonderful sight, could it be true? Brown Eyes' father, on leaving the hospital with his mind full of the little hearts at home, had caught his own little boy in his fall at the very hospital door, and the weary, overwrought child was sobbing in the arms, that meant to him love and protection.

"Brown Eyes, my boy, my darling, what does this mean? Who has brought you here?" he asked.

"No one, papa, I had to come, I couldn't stay, they said 'She's dying,' ain't she?" and

then as the father looked bewildered, added, "That's what the paper said."

In a moment the reason of the child's alarm was clear. He had not been home to report. Bad news travels fast and gathers darker and darker clouds of evil tidings as it goes.

"No, my pet, she's not dying. Mother is very weak and has to be very quiet, but we don't think she will die. God must hear our prayers and save her for us. We couldn't spare her, could we?"

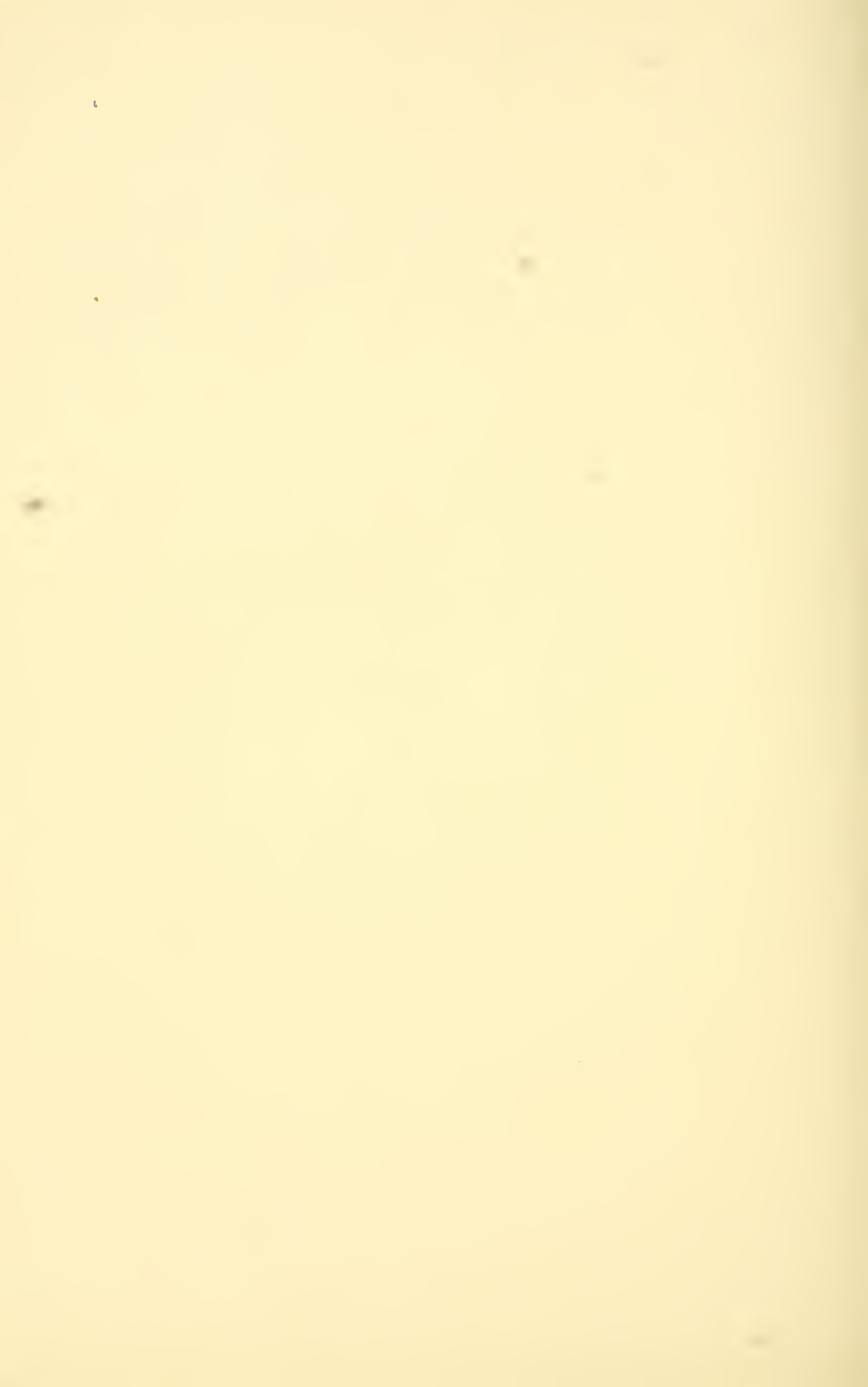
Then he led the child down the long corridors and whispered something to a nurse and in a moment or two, she came back with the message, "Yes, he may go in." Brown Eyes found himself in a darkened quiet room kneeling by a white bed, with his little flushed face resting against a hand he loved so well, though it was white and thin now.

"Mother, oh, mother, you must not die, please don't," he pleaded.

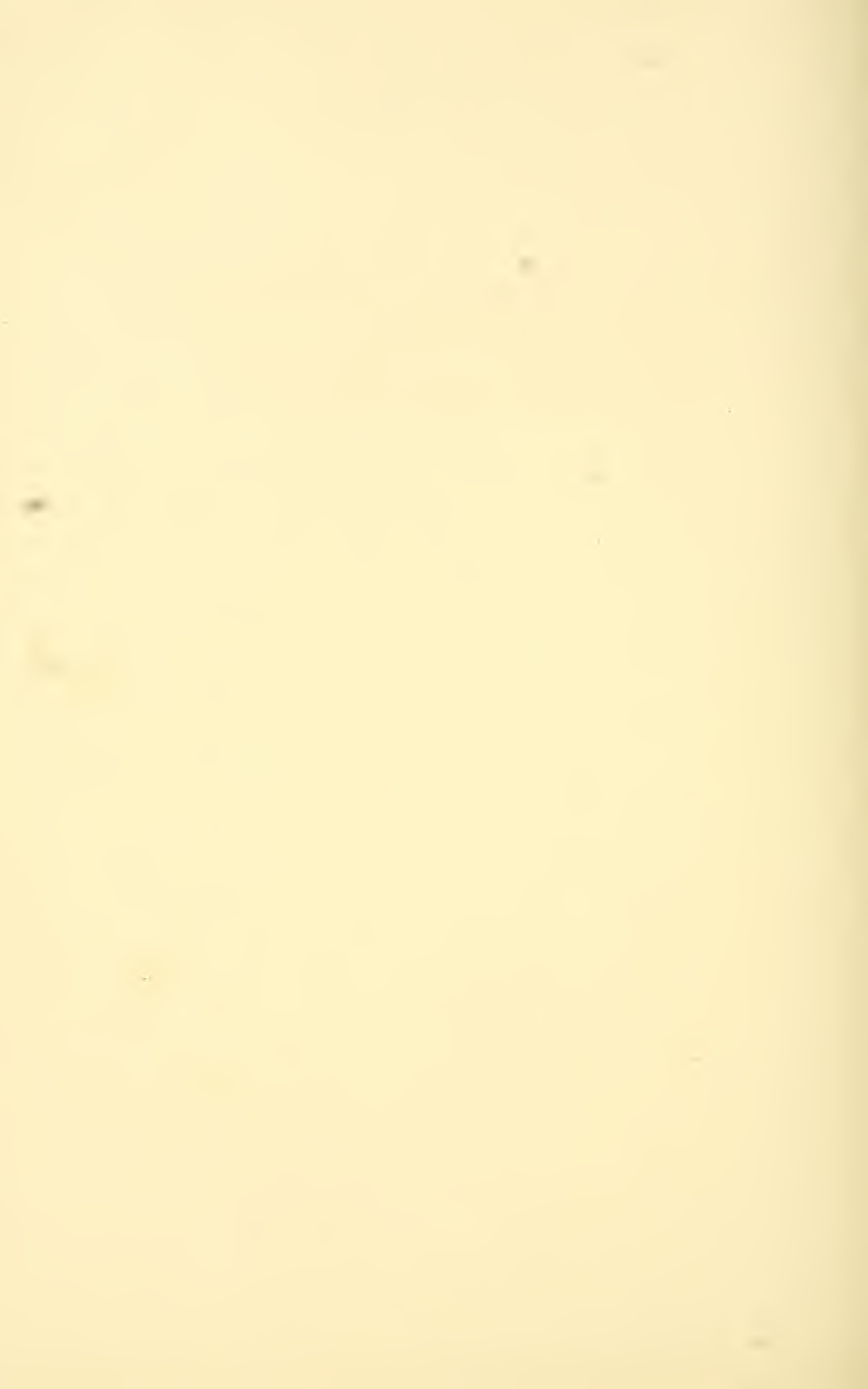
Mother laughed a funny weak laugh, with a sob in it and whispered back as she smoothed the brown hair, "No, my pet, I won't, I promise I won't if I can help it."

Then papa took him away with smiles breaking through the tears, and a big load off his poor little heart. If Brown Eyes had had a good memory for poetry, and had been of a poetic turn of mind he might have quoted, "Behind the cloud is the sun still shining," but instead he said, "I feel quite hungry, now, papa, I didn't have any dinner." While mother was thinking, "What a sweet surprise! Why didn't papa tell me he had brought Brown Eyes with him to-day."

At home Baby Dimple was crying for her brother and trying to find consolation for this double bereavement by hugging the old wrapper, while nurse was declaring very indignantly, "It beats me where Master Brown Eyes has gone, how he can play out with those boys at school when his poor mother is sick, and Miss Dimple all alone is more than I can say. I don't know what some children's hearts are made of," and she certainly did not.



SUNSET.





CHAPTER XI.

SUNSET.

FROM the day Baby Dimple learned that Brown Eyes had seen mother, she begged and pleaded with all the earnestness of child-longing to go to the hospital. Papa explained that mother must not be excited, that a quiet sick room was not the place for this active, romping baby, and that worst of all he feared parting from her pet when she had once seen her again would be very hard for mother.

Baby Dimple had an answer for every objection. She would be quiet as a mouse, she would stroke mother's hand and help put

her asleep, she would be very, very good. Papa at last began to weaken, for it was hard to hear the plea at the hospital, "I do so want my baby," and coming home to hear the little echo of the same voice pleading in childish eagerness, "Oh, do, do take me to my own mother." So one evening he said, "My darling, to-morrow I will take you to see mother, but you must promise one thing. You must not cry when I take you away again, for if you do it will make mother very sick and keep her away from us much longer." Between her many hugs of gratitude the excited baby gave the promise, and then flew upstairs to bed without one word about staying up later, for the sooner to bed the sooner would to-morrow be here.

What an anxious little face it was that peered from the window while nurse was combing out the silky, golden curls. It was a cold, raw day, one of those Fall days that forecast winter, and make the gold and crimson glories of the forest shiver at the thought of the cold damp earth that is drawing them

down to it like a magnet. "You need not count on going to-day, Miss Dimple, I am sure your papa meant if it was bright and fine. He won't take you to-day, mark my word," said nurse discouragingly, while the corners of the dear, little, dimpled mouth turned down and the blue eyes gathered ominous shadows, that overcast their sunshine, like rain-clouds in a summer sky.

"Don't you worry, Baby, dear," came reassuringly from the other end of the room where Brown Eyes was lacing his shoes, "papa never breaks his promises. He will have you wrapped up warm, and you will see our own mother, sure enough to-day." The clouds lifted and Baby Dimple gave a little, chuckling, contented laugh, and nurse having finished the last curl, she bounded away to wake up sleepy papa.

What a demure little figure it was that sat by papa's side on the train, clad in a fluffy white coat and cap, with hands incased in little white mittens. An expression of supreme content beamed on the sweet, little face, and

every now and then the small hand stole into papa's, and the blue eyes sought his face, while the soft, little laugh told of happy thoughts and anticipations.

As they walked together, this tall man and the little, white-clad tot, up the long, white, marble corridor, the solemn caution was again given. "Now, mind, you must not cry when you have to come away, you must be very brave for mother's sake."

No words can describe the joy to mother and child hearts united again after a weary separation, when they have ached and strained in longing for each other. Baby Dimple lay quiet as a little mouse on her mother's bed, and stroked the thin white hand, while mother kissed over and over again the golden head, and the fresh, flushed face that made such a contrast to her own pale cheeks. They talked in whispers and laughed over their happiness, though every time the impulsive child hugged and held her mother tight, there was a cloud on the little face and sound of tears in her voice.

“Oh, I wish it would thunder and lighten, rain, hail and snow all at once!”

“Why, what for, my pet?” asked mother surprised at this sudden desire for so mixed an atmospheric disturbance.

“Because, because, then I’d have to stay here, I couldn’t go away.” The last wailing words were verging very near the forbidden line, so making a brave effort, Baby Dimple changed the subject, hiding her little face in the lovely bunch of delicate freesias that stood on the little table, near the bed.

How cruelly quick the clock ticked off the minutes of those two hours, and then papa with a warning glance told Baby Dimple that they must say “good bye.” The little face was solemn and the little lips sternly closed, as they were stretched up to mother for a good bye kiss. Not a murmur, not a sigh, but mother knew her baby’s every look, and saw what a tremendous battle for self-control was going on. Baby Dimple turned and walked deliberately to the door, without looking back, but the little white-mittened hands

could not turn the handle. Papa was delayed to give mother one more good bye kiss. That minute proved too much, and mother saw the little white figure lean up in the corner by the door, with its pathetic little back still bravely turned to her, and the little face buried in the white mittens, and she knew her baby was helpless to move in an agony of sobbing. Papa awoke to the situation and, flying to the rescue, carried the weeping child away, and oh ! how mother's heart ached for the brave, little soul, who had tried so hard not to let mother see her grief. Poor papa had a sorrowful time of it down the whole length of the corridor ; the mother-sick child gave full vent to her grief, and there was no abatement to the sobs and tears when they reached the street and took the car. All the way down town to the office, papa held in his arms the little, sobbing bundle, drooping and dejected, and his coat was wet with very bitter tears. The many kindly, sympathetic faces at papa's office, generally the place of perfect delight, could win no responsive smile, and the lovely,

new doll, put into her arms as a comforter, was utterly disregarded, and even unconsciously held head downward, while at intervals the pitiful, little voice pleaded, "I want my mother, I don't want anything else."

How soon when the sun breaks forth do we forget the rain-clouds; when joy makes our sorrows vanish like the morning mist, sad shadows cannot exist however deep they were, in the full brightness of a present noonday. So the little hearts forgot their cloudy, rainy days, when once more mother was the centre of their home life. Her lounge was drawn up on winter evenings before the bright, log fire, and in the firelight the old time stories would be told, only in those stories, no mother could ever be sick, no children were allowed to be motherless, or Baby Dimple's tender little heart would have been so painfully wrung with sympathy, that the pleasure of the evening hour would have been brought to an untimely end.

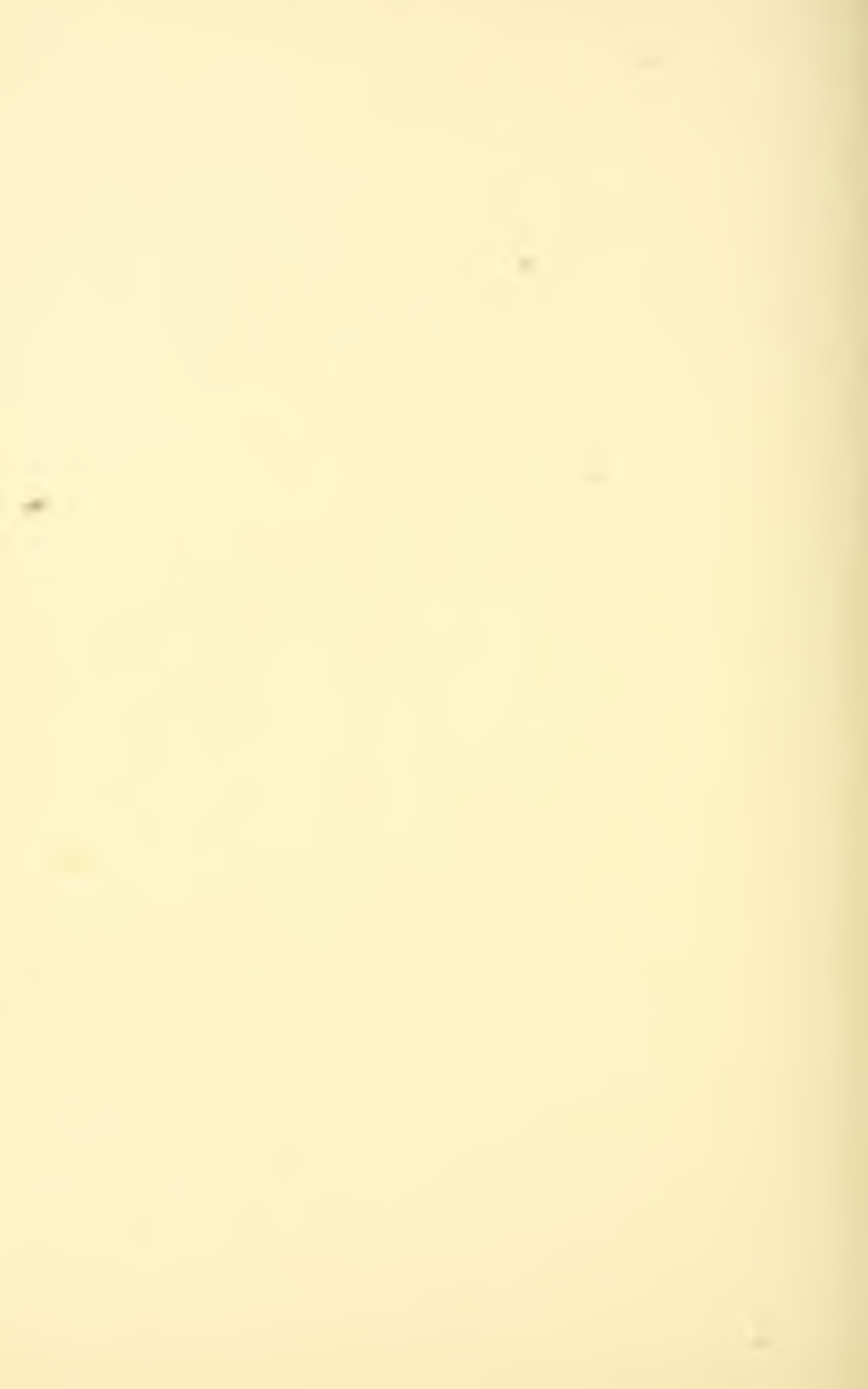
Winter passed and then came lovely Spring, and mother's room was bright with daffodils,

and jonquils and the window curtain fluttered in the soft breeze. The birds had come again. In the early dawn before the little eyes were open, the call of the robin sounded and resounded from the garden, and seemed joyous and confident in telling of the coming life and beauty of Nature's awakening. Then, for our little ones, came the day of great delight, when they traveled down to the quiet cottage at the beach, where they would play on the sand, and swim in the clear blue water of the bay. Sweet, glad days those were, made all the brighter because of the dreary months of separation, and the time of tears now forgotten by the happy children. They saw and felt only the joy of the present life.

There were long drives together in the woods, when they listened to the sweet notes of the many song birds, unknown to them, or leaving the path hunted under the leaves for the waxy blossoms of the May flower. As summer advanced, there was the ever growing delight of the cool water, in which they almost lived. Mother would lie on the sand



“ I WANT MY MOTHER ”



reading, and the children would wade, and splash, and frolic with the wavelets, like little sea-elves. What brown little faces, feet and hands those were, that came all dripping and salty to cuddle close to mother when weary with play. But mother did not mind the tan, or the salt, or the sand, being very thankful for the healthy hardiness of her darlings.

One evening as the sun was setting, casting his lovely hues of orange, sapphire and gold on the glittering ripples of the bay, and laying a mysterious shining gauze of yellow beams over the garden, flowers and trees, mother lay in the hammock on the piazza with Baby Dimple in her arms. The air was heavy with the perfume of honeysuckles that had festooned themselves all over the porch, and the murmuring song of belated bees, mingled with the sighing of the little waves, that were gently singing themselves to sleep on the shore.

Baby Dimple had been very quiet for some time; mother had been thinking, and her thought had brought an anxious, wistful

look to her eyes as she gazed at the wonderful gateways of gold to which the sun was driving his fiery chariot.

"Mother, darling, my *own* mother," said the little one suddenly, flinging her arms impetuously around her mother, "I am *sure* you won't die, you can't die."

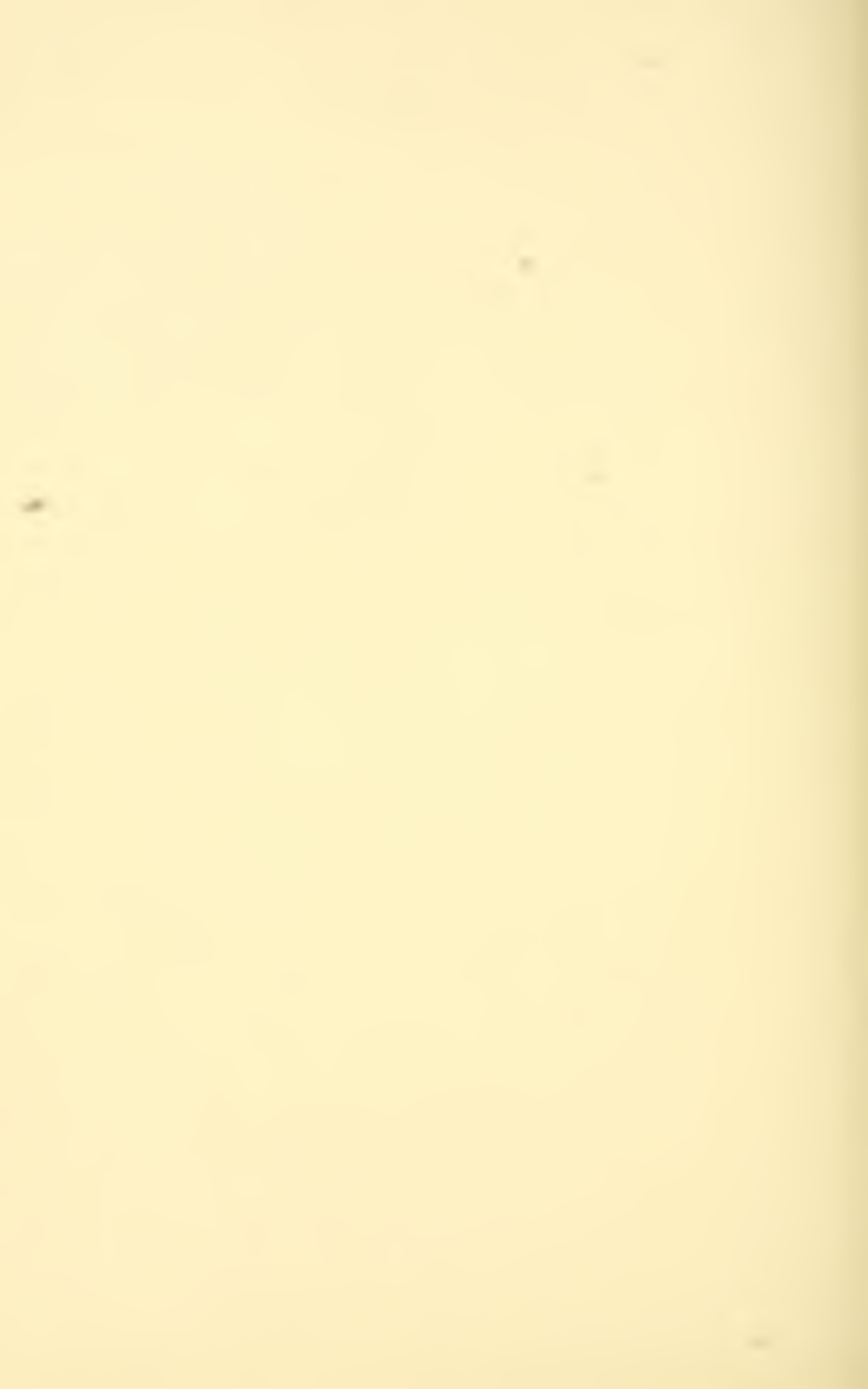
"I hope not, my darling, but why are you so sure?"

"Because, because we love each other so, and I know Jesus wouldn't let us love you so, and wouldn't let you love me so just to take us away from each other, would He?"

Mother's only answer was a shower of kisses on the golden curls, and though the argument was not logical, and could not be substantiated by precedent, still it was very sweet to her, and very comforting to a little heart that sometimes was heavy even now with the bare thought of such a separation. Then their little talk was broken by the advent of Brown Eyes, his face flushed with pride, his clothes wet and bedraggled, bearing a fine

string of shining fish, which he called papa out from his reading to admire.

So we will leave them grouped together on the lawn with smiling faces, and joyous voices, and hearts so closely linked together, and loving all the world so simply, that as Brown Eyes once said, "I think this is just the happiest home in all the world, isn't it, mother?"



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